ELFRICA.

Joseph Hill
March 23rd
1888

ELFRICA.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'SOUTHWARK AND ITS STORY.'

'A mighty strong champion of Somerset.'
FULLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN OF SPRING AND OF DE TRISTRAM.

The long winter nights were yielding their place by degrees to the lengthening days, and the legends told by the peat-fires were being replaced by the flowers of spring, and still they waited for news from Somerset. It came at last, and was brought by Sir Almeric himself; but how little did De Courcy expect of its tenour, or guess why it had been so long delayed!

Early one morning the news came that an English vessel was in sight; and before

Sir John was ready, another messenger brought word that Sir Almeric de Tristram's banner was flying at the mast.

'I had not thought,' said De Courcy to his wife, 'that they would have come first to Doune. It is Mabel's desire to see you that has brought them hither.'

'And not Sir Tristram's to see you?' she answered gaily.

De Courcy was overjoyed; he could not even wait till Elfrica had arrayed herself suitably.

'Come with a grand train,' he said, 'befitting the way in which the Lady de Courcy should greet the Baroness of Howth. Meanwhile, I will hasten on, and welcome them home.'

So eager was he, that he could scarcely stay to receive the loving messages of Elfrica.

'No matter,' she said; 'I shall be there before they land, and shall give them my own welcome.'

The vessel had rounded Slieve Ban,

and was now making its way through Strangford Lough. Joyfully did De Courcy wave his cap as it neared the harbour, and lead a ringing cheer. No answering shout was returned.

The graceful figure of Sir Tristram could now be made out as he stood, clad in armour from head to foot; but from his helmet waved no plume — no brilliant embroidered scarf crossed his shoulder; all was

'Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern.'

He stood like a carved image, and might have been a figure of his own ancestor, Sir Tristram of the Round Table, so motionless and statuesque was he. One hand was laid on the shoulder of his eldest son, the other pressed close to his side— two slight figures clad in mourning-weeds.

Sir John scanned the deck anxiously. Where was Mabel? Would not she be eagerly seeking for the first sight of Doune, of himself, and of Elfrica? She

must be below—ill, perhaps, and wearied with the voyage. He was but trying to combat the apprehension that was gaining upon him, and sinking like a dead-weight upon his heart.

Again he waved his cap, but this time he could raise no shout of welcome. De Tristram saluted with his sword—the first movement he had made; and then by degrees a deep, dead silence fell on all who watched, as the vessel glided into port.

De Courcy turned to his page.

'Hasten,' he said, 'back to the Castle. If you meet the Lady de Courcy, say that I begged she would return and await us there. Should she not have already started, desire Sir Bertram to detain her. Haste for thy life!'

The boy sped away, and De Courcy, almost before the vessel touched the shore, leapt on board.

'My brother!' It was all he could say, as he grasped Sir Almeric's hand, and the

deep silence told what Sir Almeric could not say.

The three boys crowded round their uncle to receive his greetings, which he gave silently, and with strong emotion. Nicholas struggled to imitate his father's immovability, but the younger boys wept bitterly, and Sir John could not control his tears; but Sir Tristram neither spoke nor wept.

Sir Bertram approached, sent by the anxious Elfrica to learn the worst. De Courcy desired the boys to accompany him to their aunt, and then, arm-in-arm, the two Knights passed through the attendant throng; every head was bared, but no word spoken, as the brothers-in-arms, by marriage, and more than all by love, passed on. They took their way neither to the Castle nor the Cathedral, but to a favourite grove at a little distance, where, without fear of interruption, they could pour out their hearts to each other.

Meanwhile, Sir Bertram led the boys to the Castle; on their way, from the prattle of the little ones, he learned what had befallen.

They had had a little sister; she was sent to them for just a few days, and then she went away, and took their mother with her.

'And your father?'

'Oh, papa has been ill, very ill—they thought he would have died too; and grandmother and Uncle Jordan had nursed him, and then we came away.'

Nicholas walked on with the gravity and seeming impassiveness of his father; but when they reached the Castle, and he saw his aunt, whose sweet, fair beauty and tender grace had so touched the boy's heart, and she held out both her hands to him, as the tears flowed from her eyes, he too gave way, and burst into uncontrollable sobs. She drew him away, she took him to her own bower; she told him how only that very morning she had been looking

forward to the Lady de Tristram's coming, to be to her a dear sister.'

'But, Nicholas, tell me, how was it that neither your father nor your grandmother let us know of this?'

'It was my father, madame my aunt. He forbade that any messenger should be sent. He said that your bright wedded days should not be dimmed by his sorrows. He longed—oh, so much!—for my uncle; but he delayed coming, though he was told it was better for him to go away after his illness, because he would not bring this grief upon him. But when he saw my uncle, and heard the joyous shout, he trembled from head to foot, and murmured: "My God, give me strength to bear it!" And after that he never spoke one word; and then—then—they went away together.'

'And your uncle?'

'He said no word but "My brother!"'

Lady de Courcy was now weeping bitterly herself, and now Nicholas took the *rôle* of comforter. He said how greatly he

had longed that his father should be here—that at Stoke everything reminded him of his mother; it was there he had wooed and won her. But she had never been in Ireland, and so there would be no sad associations connected with her. 'But ——' and the boy's grief broke forth again, 'how we have looked forward to our coming, and making my mother known to you! It was to have been—it should have been—such a happy meeting!'

'Dear Nicholas,' she said timidly, 'the meeting is only deferred. She is making ready now to receive us, instead of we her.'

And then Lady de Courcy roused herself, and thought of the little boys, whom she found with Edgitha, who was caring for their comfort; and, after they had refreshed themselves, she led them into the Castle grounds. And then, leaning upon Nicholas's arm, she paced the terrace with him, while the younger boys played under Edgitha's care.

At last the two Knights approached. How she dreaded and yet longed for the interview to be over! De Tristram saluted her with his wonted courtesy. Her eyes were brimming over with tears, and the look on his pale, grave, handsome features made them flow again.

'Dear sister, how can I thank you? You are already fulfilling her last request.'

She looked inquiringly at him, and he spoke with an effort.

'Ask her—ask our sister Elfrica to be a sister to Nicholas, and a mother to the others.'

She held out her hand.

'So help me God, I will!'

He put it to his lips, and it were difficult to say whether De Courcy's glance, as it fell on both, rested with more love on his friend and brother, or on his wife.

And so a deep shadow had fallen on this happy household. Sir Tristram strove bravely 'to take up the burden of life

again.' He went to Howth, and Nicholas, who became his father's shadow, went with him, whilst De Tristram thankfully allowed the little boys to remain at Doune under their aunt's charge. But the greater part of Sir Almeric's time was spent at Doune, and it was touching to see how, in their divided labour, he ever chose the more distant or more dangerous post, so as to leave De Courcy as much as possible at his home.

Meanwhile, the rebuilding of the Cathedral went on prosperously. It had been dedicated in the name of the Holy Trinity, and a notable feature in the old building had been a statue or group over the high altar of the Three Persons of the Godhead. This had been taken down while the works had been going on, and was to be replaced when the building was completed, in the niche made for it in the corresponding position to that it had occupied before; but when placed there by the side of the fresh and magnificent

Norman work in the choir, it looked so coarse and mean, the work so rough, the conception so poor, that the master workman declared it at once to be utterly unworthy of its surroundings. Whilst considering what was to be done, Nicholas remembered and brought to light a statue of St. Patrick, which Sir Henry de Louvelle had sent to De Courcy as a present by the hands of Sir Almeric de Tristram, but which, in his sad return, had been forgotten. It was now searched for, and found carefully packed away. Sir Henry had been visiting Glastonbury, and being much struck with the work of one of the lay-brothers, had ordered the statue of St. Patrick as an appropriate wedding gift for his old pupil. Being brought to light, it was found exactly to fit the vacant niche, and appeared in every respect far more suitable than the not very reverend representation of the Triune Majesty. So it was decided, and De Courcy arranged to place the old group in a

chapel specially dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

After this had been done, Elfrica came to see it. She looked grave and thoughtful.

'What is it, my wife? Does not this new arrangement please you?'

'It is only,' she said, 'that I can scarce reconcile to myself the seeing a saint exalted above his Maker, and man put in the place of the Almighty.'

'I would not fail in due reverence, my darling, but this will give real satisfaction to the Irish, and please them more than aught else could do, and the old image is already placed in another shrine.'

Elfrica still looked doubtful, but for once De Courcy did not give way; he firmly believed in the good effect that the honour paid to their patron saint would have upon the native Irish, who then, as ever, can be ruled through their sentiment rather than through appeals to their reason or common-sense.

Before Christmas-tide came round again,

a new happiness and deep joy came to De Courcy. His Elfrica had made him a father. And now a grave discussion arose with regard to the boy's name. Elfrica would have called him John, but De Courcy laughingly protested that he could not—at any rate, at present—consent to be old John; it would be time enough when there was half a dozen more. He looked wonderingly at the little creature—for tiny enough it appeared to him, though assured on good authority that it was a fine child; but still the knotty point was not decided when the nurse pronounced that her mistress must be left quiet. It was on the evening of the same day that Father Gregory came to read her the short prayers for Compline, and then she asked him would it trouble him too much to read the baptismal service?

'I cannot be present to-morrow,' she said, 'but I wish to follow my child's baptism in spirit.'

The Father read the service to her in

Latin, and her husband explained to her such words as she did not understand. After a few minutes' pause, she said:

'John, our boy is to be a soldier, as you are. He is to be a sworn soldier of Christ. Let his name be Miles, to remind him of his baptismal vow.'

And so, on the morrow, the babe was presented in the chapel by Edgitha, and, after the holy rite was over, the infant soldier was laid in his mother's arms again, by the stalwart Knight his father, with the crystal cross still glistening on his brow.

Ireland was now in such good order—the country prosperous, the people submissive, if not yet altogether contented—that anxiety and trouble seemed well-nigh over, and there appeared every hope of the island becoming an integral part of the English empire, and that before long a fusion of the races would blend together the interests of all, and that, within a measurable distance, the difference between conquerors and conquered would be forgotten. But,

alas! the evil destiny which seems always to have pursued our government there had already begun; and just *because* all was well, King Henry grew jealous of the Lord Deputy. For some time he carried on a system of irritating and harassing interference, which had only the effect of showing De Lacy's greatness of soul, and how far he was from pettiness and ill-will; then he suddenly recalled him to England, and keeping him there for some years, detained him without any explanation of his cause of complaint, but refused him permission to return. Meanwhile, Sir John de Courcy was commissioned to act in his absence.

Expecting to be absent but a short time, Sir Hugh de Lacy only took with him his younger son, Hugh, whom he placed at Court about the person of Prince John, and whom the King intended to serve as a kind of hostage for his father's fidelity. It was here that Sir Hugh met once more his cousin, Randal de Lacy; and, finding

that the young man was bearing himself well, and was in good odour at Court, he commended his son to his good offices, little guessing that he was thereby giving him a tutor in everything mean and base; and Randal professed the deepest gratitude for all that his cousin had done for him.

Sir Hugh, however, still failed in getting the King's permission to return to Ireland, of which, nevertheless, he still continued nominally the Lord Deputy and Justiciary. He spent part of his time, therefore, in visiting his nephew, Sir Damian de Lacy, and the Lady Eveline his wife, who administered his large English estates on the marches of Wales. Their castle of the Garde Douloureuse was in truth the property of the lady; here he was received with a warmth of welcome and a delicate attention that touched the old man deeply, and all he saw there made him regret still more that his wife's opposition had resulted in keeping his eldest son at home instead

of placing him in their charge. Around them were growing up a bright band of boys and girls, and the Lady Eveline held her sway amongst them within doors as well and as wisely as the brave knight her husband did without; and withal they lived together in the most perfect harmony and affection towards each other.

But Sir Hugh was summoned back to Court, and on parting he told them it was scarcely likely that they should ever meet again in this life. He blessed them, and as he rode away he murmured: 'Thank God, there is nothing to regret there.' A deep sigh followed. Was he contrasting his own married life with the happiness he had just witnessed, and these well-trained children with his own unruly sons?

On his return to Court he made a careful study of the character of the young Prince whose appanage he knew it was intended that Ireland should be. He found him a wilful spoilt boy, with the Provencial wit he inherited from his mother,

mingled with the proud passionate nature that was his father's. The fiendish love of cruelty, which was perhaps the result of the union of two undisciplined natures, was not yet developed ; but signs of it were visible, and Sir Hugh saw enough to make him bitterly regret having placed his son about his person, though he really had little choice in the matter, as the King's expressed wish amounted to a command. Careful training might have moulded Prince John into a fine character, but such training was not to be had at the English Court, which was anything but a school of virtue ; and a mother's love and care were absent, for Henry, in order to pursue his course of unbridled license unchecked, had imprisoned his wife ; nor was she released till her son Richard came to the throne.

At last the good Lord Deputy was allowed to return, and great were the rejoicings at his arrival. From none was the welcome more warm than from Sir John de Courcy.

'And you are willing,' said De Lacy, 'to yield again the power to me?'

'Indeed I am,' he answered. 'It is little enough I have seen of my own home in your absence; and De Tristram and I hope to spend a quiet time at Doune, for I would fain see more of my wife and our boys.'

'Boys!' said Sir Hugh; 'I knew not that you had more than one son.'

'Nor have I,' he answered; 'but Almeric's boys are almost as much ours as his.'

'The Lady de Courcy,' said Sir Almeric, 'is a tender mother to my motherless boys, and lets them not feel their loss.'

Sir John de Courcy and Sir Almeric de Tristram accompanied De Lacy to Meath; and then, after giving in their report on the state of the country, turned their faces towards Doune. And now De Courcy hoped to be able to spend some time with Elfrica in the home which had become

so dear to them both. She had never become less lovely in his eyes, and very precious were the glimpses he had of her in the short times that he had been able to spare from his deputed labours.

Sir Hugh's return had been unexpected, so that his own arrival was not looked for, and it was with a half-boyish feeling of glee that he hoped to take her by surprise. No messenger was sent on to announce his arrival; and on dismounting at the outer gate he found it was the time for vespers. He doubted not, therefore, that he should find her in the chapel. Thither he went; the psalms were being sung, and he could see Elfrica with her boy by her side. The Nisi Dominus was being chanted as he entered the chapel, and sweetly upon his ear came the notes of the choristers, pealing out the praises of a happy and God-fearing household; and as he took his place beside her, the words were: 'O, well is thee, and happy shalt thou be. Thy wife shall be as the fruit-

ful vine upon the walls of thine house, thy children like the olive branches round about thy table.' Then burst out the response: 'Lo! thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.'

At that moment Elfrica saw her husband by her side, looking at her with that deep tenderness with which he ever regarded her. Her hand stole into his, and remained there till the service was over.

'Your little olive branch, John,' she said, as she lifted the boy into his arms, and he carried him back into the Castle.

And now they enjoyed a period of rest and repose such as they had scarce known since their marriage. Their little son showed a bright intelligence beyond his years, whilst Sir Almeric de Tristram's sons were growing up all that the fondest father could wish, and they felt that they had another father and a mother in Sir John de Courcy and his wife.

It was the first evening after the re-united family had been gathered together, and Miles demanded a story from his mother.

'By all means,' said De Courcy. 'It is long since I have heard a Manx legend. What shall it be, Lady Fair?'

'"The Treasures of the Deep."*

She said:

'It was long ago that an idea possessed the Manx men that as Mona had so long served as a place of refuge for persons of high rank, there might probably lie buried beneath the waters some of the treasures which they had brought with them when flying from their enemies. Now it so happened that a machine had been constructed of strange shape and form; it was

* This legend is, like the others, from Walrond's 'History of the Isle of Man.' He assigns its date to the period immediately after the Armada. But as there is nothing in the tale itself to intimate this, I have ventured to transfer it to an earlier period.

made of metal cased in leather, tough and strong. In this one named Godred Dhune undertook to descend into the depths below the waves. Let down by a vast length of rope, he descended from a vessel moored near the coast; and as they paid out more and more rope, he ever pulled at it and shook it as a sign that he would go lower and lower still; and still they added more and more cord, till they had no more that they *could* add. One who was there, a wise man, said that by the quantity of line paid out, he must have descended more than twice the number of leagues that the moon is distant from the earth.

'At last they had no more cord to add, and then they began to turn the wheel and haul the machine up again with Godred Dhune within it; and this is the tale he told of what he saw:

'"As the cord was being paid out, I passed through the region of fishes, and saw from the little window in the machine

fish of every kind, swimming past me in the clear bright waters. They swam towards it and touched it with their noses, as trying to discover what this strange thing that disturbed their empire was. Still I went down, down, past the region of fish, for they only live tolerably near the surface. Then I came to a pure element, clear as the air on the serenest day, through which as I went I saw the floor of the water world paved with coral and shining pebbles, which glittered like sunbeams reflected on glass, and with a brightness that dazzled my eyes. I longed to tread the delightful paths, and glad was I when the machine grazed upon the bottom.

'"Then I saw streets and large squares ornamented on every side with bright pyramids of crystal not inferior in brightness to the finest diamonds. There was a mansion most beauteous to behold, built not of stone or brick, but of mother-of-pearl, and embossed in various figures

with shells of all colours. The entrance to this being open, I endeavoured to move the machine towards it, which I did. And I entered a spacious hall, in the midst of which stood a large table of yellow amber, with several chairs around it. The floor was composed of rough diamonds, topazes, emeralds, rubies, and pearls. Fain would I have gathered of these precious stones, but found that they were too firmly embedded in cement to be moved.

"Around this chamber hung chains, carcanets, bracelets, rings and girdles of precious stones, finely cut and set after our manner; and these were hung loosely on the jasper walls by strings made of rushes. Then, as I saw how little they were regarded here, and as they came from the earth, surely it was lawful, I thought, to take them to the earth again. I edged myself nearer and nearer, and just as I was stretching out my hand to take one of the beauteous trinkets that hung thus unguarded and uncared-for, lo! I felt the

machine move, and up, up through the crystal ether I was borne; and as I passed upwards I saw comely mermen with lovely sea-maidens, disporting themselves in the green flood. But when they saw this strange, unknown thing, they avoided it. Meanwhile I was drawn upwards, against my will, and landed once more in the vessel."

'But after this adventure Godred Dhune left the ship, and staying ever by the coast, he passed his time gazing into the depths below. He pined ever for the fair sights he had seen and the treasures he had left, and fading away with exceeding desire and longing, he died.'

'But, mamma,' said Miles, 'why didn't he go down again? *I* would have gone down, and brought away lots of beautiful things; and I would have caught a mermaid, and kept her for myself.'

'Take care, Miles,' said his father, laughing. 'I don't want a mermaid for a

daughter; and after all, do you think you could find one prettier than mamma?'

'Ah! but,' said the child, 'mamma has not a fish's tail.'

'And do you think you would love her better with one? I don't think *I* should. Look at her pretty little feet.'

'And her pretty slippers,' said Miles.

'It's of no use, John,' said Lady de Courcy, laughing; 'you can't get a compliment for me from Miles. We will hope that somewhere or other some sweet little fairy is waiting for him, to make him a good wife in time to come.'

'Ah, mamma, I should like a fairy for a wife better than a mermaid; but can you get one for me?'

'I fear not, my boy. The fairies once had it all to themselves in Mona, but ever since the sacred fire was let to die out, and the fishermen first landed, fairies and men have divided the land between them, and now the men seem to have the best part of it. But what do you think one story says

the fishermen saw when first they landed? Just as the mist had lifted from the island, and they could see clearly the beautiful country to which they had come, rolling down the beach towards them they saw a great wheel of fire with three legs for spokes; and this so frightened the men that they fled to their boats, and it was some time before they dared to land on the enchanted island again.'

'And is that why Uncle Reginald had the wheel with the three legs on his banner when he came to see us?' said Miles.

'Yes, I believe so,' she answered; for in that age no one would have thought of such scepticism as wholly to disbelieve in the existence of mermaid or fairy. 'But have you no fairies in Somerset, my Lord?'

'Ah! Elfrica, I fear I know nothing of them, if there be any; it is little that I have been in Somerset for years, and at Glastonbury we heard more of the deeds of saints, and were forbidden to speak of the "good people." Tales of Arthur we

learned both at Glastonbury and Castle Cary. Perhaps Edgitha may know somewhat of pixy-lore.'

'Pixies, my Lord, belong to Devon rather than Somerset; but our home at Exmoor was of course on the border-land between the two counties. They are good to the industrious, and those who keep well their houses; but to the idle and lazy, to those who seek to pry into their secrets, they are vexatious and mischievous. Some of the pixies attach themselves to particular families, and then they do them all manner of good; but woe betide any that offend them: they pinch them black and blue—they give them a changeling babe instead of their own—they cast evil spells on their cattle. Nay, at Yuletide they will take a fat ox, eat all its flesh, and then, drawing the skin over the bare bones, will replace it in its stall, so that the farmer in the morning will find his fattest ox a mere heap of skin and bone.' *

* See Mrs. Bray's 'Peep at the Pixies.'

Edgitha's account was given shyly and nervously, and she did not dress up her tale as the Lady Elfrica had done; and so Master Miles grew impatient, and said:

'Mamma dear, you have not told us a tale of a mermaid yet. Have you ever seen one?'

'No, Miles, I have never seen a mermaid, though so many strange tales are told about them.'

'Oh! tell me one,' said the little tyrant.

'Pray tell us one,' said the rest of the circle. And Sir Bertram stirred the glowing embers into a bright flame, while an attendant brought some fresh logs; and Sir John sat in his high-backed chair, with Miles perched on one of the arms; and John and Arthur de Tristram lay at their aunt's feet, following her words eagerly; while opposite sat the grave and sad Sir Almeric de Tristram, with Nicholas by his side. Sir Bertram and Edgitha, Father Gregory and Sir John Savage, with one or two other Knights and their personal at-

tendants, made up the circle. Elfrica turned towards her husband.

'Yes, tell us one,' he said, 'and I will keep awake.'

'Do not be too sure,' she said. 'My tale is called

'"The Mermaid and the Shepherd."

'Close to the edge of the sea, where one of the lovely valleys of my native land run down to the coast, a shepherd kept his sheep. He was wont at times to seat himself on a rock which overhung the sea, and there play his lute, whilst at the same time he could watch his sheep in the valley, and the sounds served to keep his flock from wandering.

'It chanced one day, that as he was following his usual custom, a mermaid, fair and lovely to behold, with tresses shining in the sun, and eyes blue as the sky, rose to the surface, attracted by the sweet sounds.

'The shepherd was astonished, perhaps

alarmed, for though he had often heard of mermaids, he had never before chanced to see one, and had scarcely even believed that there were such beings. Her wondrous beauty and her strange figure both amazed him; and on her side, the young man's handsome appearance completed the impression that the sweet strains of his music had already made. So it came to pass that day by day as he fed his sheep in the valley, as soon as the soft music was heard, bubbles would be seen on the surface of the water, then there would be a slight commotion in the waves, and at last would be seen the form of the wondrous creature, half-woman and half-fish; and as he sat on the rock, she placed herself by his side. He played on his lute, and she combed her long hair and sang to him sweet songs of the sea, of her home beneath the waters, and the glorious treasures there; she sang also of the sad sights they saw, for the floor of the sea was one vast burial-ground. But then again she would sing of the palace of the

king, and his caves glittering with precious jewels; of the queen's garden of fair plants, which men call weeds, whose beds were marked out with pearls, and the wide sea-lawns ornamented with rockeries composed of red and white coral, shells of strange shapes and gorgeous hues, with a sheen upon their colours that dazzled the eyes of those that looked upon them.

'These, she told him, were brought from countries far away—seas he had never heard of, where whole islands were made of this coral, where summer ever reigned, and feathery palms were mirrored in the clear depths, while strange and unknown fish swam in the waters.

'The youth loved to listen to her tales, but he shrank from her embrace; and even had she been willing to give up all for him, he felt that he had nothing to give her in exchange, for he knew not of the immortal soul she would gain by union with a mortal. But he was acting an unworthy part, for in truth he had a love of his own,

to whom he was tenderly attached, and the mermaid's gifts went to adorn his master's daughter, whose love he sought to win by these treasures from the deep.

'One day, as she sat beside him, giving him a glowing description of the beauties and pleasures below, of the delight of cleaving the green waters and swimming in the crystal depths, she flung her arms around him, and he, afraid that she would, in spite of himself, draw him with her into the bright sea, struggled in her embrace; then, as she felt him shrink from her, she told him that she would leave the sea and all its delights for love of him, and give up all her mermaid privileges and become a mortal.'

'Give up her fish's tail, mamma!'

'Yes, even her fish's tail, Miles; but now let me go on. When she found that still he struggled to free himself, and that he was endeavouring to break with her altogether, she knew that he had deceived her, and that he must have an earthly love.

Then her love changed to deadly hate, and casting on him a look in which bitter scorn was mingled with the fierce struggle which was going on within her, while love and hatred strove each to gain the upper hand, she picked up a stone, and struck him with it in his forehead.

'He sank down, and when at night the sheep did not return, they found him lying insensible by the shore. He was taken up and carried home, but his mind wandered; and when his Bertha came to see him he took her for the mermaid, and struggled to free himself from her; and in his incoherent ramblings he mingled together the mermaids' caves and the sheep in the valley, and called to Bertha, who was ever by his side, to free him from the cold grasp of the sea-maiden. She, poor loving child, knew not what to think; but after days of alternate raving and despondency, he passed away, a victim to the mermaid's vengeance.

'They buried him at the edge of the

valley, in sight of the sea, and Bertha ever came and wept over his grave; but often as she came she saw gliding away into the foam of the sea the form of the beauteous siren who had come to lay on her faithless lover's grave pieces of the coral, the pearl shells, and the sea-flowers with which she had tried to win him in life; and at night those who passed the spot, when the moon shone brightly, could see her form as she sat on the rock and sang songs, sad and sweet, a sort of lullaby to her murdered love.'

'That is a sad story, Elfrica.'

'Yes,' she said, 'for there is neither faith nor hope in it; and however bitter grief may be here, with faith and hope we know that love is eternal—not lost, but only out of sight.'

'And where learned you such sweet wisdom, my fair preacher?'

'Oh, John! I did not mean to preach, but I remembered somewhat that Father

Gregory said; and—and one learns so much from one's own heart.'

Sir Almeric leant forward, and in his low, deep voice said:

'Many thanks, dear sister. Please God, I may profit by your words.'

CHAPTER II.

PRINCE JOHN IN IRELAND.

WITH what a sentiment of regretful tenderness do we look back upon days of happiness when they have passed, and feel a sort of resentment against ourselves for not having more fully realized at the time how blessed they were. So felt John de Courcy when in years to come memory brought back to him those days of peace and love, when, surrounded by his family and friends, governing wisely and well, subduing the people as much by his justice and the mildness of his rule as by his prowess in arms, the Irish themselves—at least the best part of them—rejoicing in the blessings of good order, religion, and

civilization, he was blest at home with the purest of earthly joys, while abroad he enjoyed the honour and esteem of all.

With the object of educating and improving the people and encouraging profitable industries, he built and restored monasteries to carry on the objects that he had at heart. It was during the restoration of Doune Cathedral that he came upon the so-called relics of three saints much esteemed by the Irish, St. Patrick, St. Bridget, and St. Columba; and though perhaps he still retained his early belief that St. Patrick's last years were spent at Glastonbury, and that he was buried there, yet since the Irish tradition so persistently made Doune to be his last resting-place, De Courcy had the remains reverently collected, and erected over them a magnificent tomb, upon which he placed this inscription:

'Hi tres in Duno tumulo tumulantur in uno
Brigida, Patricius, atque Columba Pius.'*

* Camden.

And now that the Cathedral was completed and hallowed, De Courcy determined to bestow a part of the goods that had fallen to his lot in the founding of a religious house at Ardes, in County Down; and happily did he and Elfrica plan what portion of their wealth was to be surrendered to the Church to secure the blessing of God. Father Gregory heard their planning.

'Hush, my son, and you, my dear daughter!' said the good Father. 'Bargain not with the Almighty; He will not be bribed or bargained with. Give with a free heart from your abundance of the good gifts with which your Father has blessed you; but let it be with a *free* heart, hoping for nothing again.'

'But, Father,' said the Lady Elfrica, 'may we not hope that our good deeds will bring down God's blessing upon us?'

'A blessing will come, be assured, my daughter; but let it come as a free gift from your Heavenly Father's love, not to

be bargained for as a right, lest you provoke Him to requite your earthly offerings but with earthly blessings. Blessings come in a shape we little think of; and when they come, let them be received with thankfulness and—resignation.'

De Courcy was too really humble to feel hurt at the good Father's word of warning, but Elfrica rather resented the implied rebuke to her husband. Nevertheless, the work at Ardes went on happily, and St. Andrew de Stoke rose fair and in grand proportions before their eyes. In strong natures like De Courcy's a passionate love of home is ofttimes a marked characteristic, and this new foundation served to link together his earliest and his latest religious associations; for it was at the Priory Church of St. Andrew, at Stoke Courcy, built and endowed by his father, that he had first knelt in God's house by his widowed mother's side.

The ruins of St. Andrew de Stoke at Ardes may still be seen, yet how few there

are who trace the connection between the ruined monastery in Down and the ruined castle in an obscure village in Somerset!

But public events were at hand which engrossed every thought, and drew off their minds from their charitable and ecclesiastical labours.

It was in the year 1185 that a messenger came from the Baron de Lacy bidding De Courcy with all haste to Meath to receive Prince John, and requesting that Lady de Courcy would accompany him. The messenger said that the Prince had already landed at Waterford, but that he was coming north, and De Lacy was anxious to receive him with all due pomp and ceremony; to this end he was organizing a gathering of the northern chiefs and native princes, and he desired that ladies might be present to add grace to the Prince's reception.

De Courcy hesitated at first as to the expediency of taking Elfrica, but Elfrica's face pleaded so earnestly, and Sir Almeric

promised to accompany them, and devote himself to her care; so that he was glad to be persuaded that her accompanying him was the right thing to be done.

The preparations were soon completed. Sir Bertram was to remain at Doune, while Edgitha accompanied them as lady-in-waiting to the Countess of Ulster, Sir Bertram promising, with the help of Molly Stokes, the Somersetshire nurse, to take good care of Miles. Nicholas accompanied his father as Squire, his brothers remaining at Doune.

It was a goodly cavalcade that set forth, such as befitted the state of the Earl of Ulster and Baron de Courcy. Little Miles led it in great triumph, mounted on Somerset, his father riding a stout hackney, in order that Elfrica on her graceful Arab steed might keep by his side.

As soon as they had reached the boundary of Doune Sir Bertram, who had accompanied them thus far, returned with

the child in front of him, and Somerset paced impatiently, without even the child's light burden, till they came in sight of the towers of Meath, when the noble steed proudly received and bore his master's weight, sheathed as he was in armour from head to foot.

De Courcy was welcomed with the utmost cordiality and distinction by De Lacy, and warmly thanked for his despatch. On the following day it was proposed to go as far as Dublin, and if necessary even farther, in order to receive the young Prince and bring him to Tara, the ancient seat of the Irish sovereignty, with all due honour.

But De Courcy was much struck with the air of anxiety and depression with which the old Baron spoke.

'My mind misgives me,' he said, 'that this is but an excuse for removing me from the government of the country. And this I would not mind; I am getting old, and I have lands and castles enough in

England, besides my barony of Meath. It is not *that:* nor, if the lad were sent under wise control, would I grudge him the lordship of this land; but it is the being mistrusted by my sovereign, and,' added he with more energy, 'the being displaced for such a cub as that boy is. Have you seen him, De Courcy?'

'Never, my Lord.'

'And when you have, you will wish that you had never set eyes upon him. An ill-conditioned, spoilt boy, with an evil temper and just wit enough to make his insolent speeches sting, and withal with a cruelty of heart that makes him positively hateful. To have to pay homage to such a scamp! Ugh!'

'But how know you so much of the youth, my Lord?'

'How? Why, when his Grace kept me dawdling about the Court for months, I saw enough and too much of him. He is a favourite with his father; and I know not how, but he has a way of making himself

popular: why, even your old friend De Briwere gets on with him.'

'De Briwere,' said Sir John de Courcy, 'has ever followed St. Paul's maxim of "being all things to all men." Nay,' he added, seeing that Sir Hugh de Lacy's chaplain, who was present, looked rather shocked, 'I speak seriously. I never met any man like him; he never swerves from the truth—never, as far as I know, says a word he does not mean—yet he has the most wonderful power of adapting himself to any society in which he finds himself. But to return to Prince John; under whose guidance is he sent?'

'Guidance!' said De Lacy; 'under none that I know of, save Gerald de Barri.'

'What! Giraldus Cambrensis, as they call him?' said De Courcy.

'Aye. The King appointed him his tutor, and, as far as learning and accomplishments go, he has done his work well. The lad has far more book-lore than I ever had; but as for guidance or influence

for good, he might as well have sent a dummy with him. De Barri will note everything, and set it in a book and make a good story of it; and what cares the Prince for that? No, perhaps I am growing old, and croaking. When the Irish saw King Henry was our Lord, they received him as such, and paid him their allegiance; but to see us—to see me, a grizzled old man—obliged to pay our duty to a misbehaved boy! I fear me it may be another thing. Ah! my sweet lady,' he added, turning to Elfrica, who was listening anxiously, 'I should not make your bonnie face look sad.'

'Let us hope for the best, my Lord; perchance the King may send some wise councillor with him, who will guide him aright.'

'I will try and hope for the best, my dear lady; but there are those who will not be guided, and Prince John is one.'

The Baron was so depressed that Elfrica and De Courcy set themselves to do their

best to cheer the old man, but his own wife looked sullen and ill at ease. One time she grumbled that her country was to have a new master, and *that* a lad ; another time that her husband should be superseded, and, what evidently rankled most in her mind, that her own dignity should be curtailed.

On the morrow the Knights, with their retinues and a small force of men-at-arms, proceeded on their way to Dublin, the ladies of course remaining at Meath. They were met by a messenger, saying that the Prince was already on his way ; but the account he gave of the way that the Prince had angered the Irish who had met him at Waterford, made the Knights press on the more rapidly, lest some terrible uprising should take place. They hastened, that they might meet him ere he attempted to make his way through the passes of the Wicklow Mountains, with nought but Irish guides ; but even as they went, they were met by those who had

come from Waterford, and been witnesses of the insolence with which the Prince and his followers had treated the native Princes. The indignation expressed was so universal that they feared at every step to hear of murder and bloodshed.

They stayed but for such rest and refreshment as was absolutely necessary, and as De Lacy gave orders for once more hastening on their way, he added :

'Were it only for the young miscreant himself, he might meet his fate and welcome ; but to see one's life's work undone, and this fair isle, which was becoming a land of peace and good government, thrown once more into the wild disorder from which it has been rescued, Heaven knows it is hard to bear, and for all I can tell, my own son may be among his train.'

They hastened on by forced marches, and met the Prince and his followers as they entered Wicklow. Little heart had they for the beauties of hills and valleys, with their fair streams, and the lovely

scenes which abounded on every side; and it was with a great effort that these great Norman barons paid a forced and cold civility to Prince John. Amongst the Prince's retinue De Lacy found, as he had feared, his son, and still worse, as his son's chosen companion and friend, Randal de Lacy.

The Prince was as yet on his outwardly good behaviour, and De Lacy rode by his side and endeavoured to interest him in the character of the people, the condition of the cultivators of the soil, the prevalence of he Brehon customs, the state of the law, etc.; while De Courcy was able to hold converse of a more pleasant and genial character with the very vain but learned and accomplished monk, Giraldus Cambrensis.

Prince John soon tired of what he looked upon as the schooling of Sir Hugh, and called to his side one of his knights, who at sight of De Courcy started as if he had met some noxious reptile. De Lacy, seeing that the Prince no longer

paid him even any show of attention, dropped behind and joined De Courcy.

'Alas!' said the old Baron, 'I fear the King, wise as he is, has made a sad mistake in suffering jealousy of his faithful Barons to grow to such a head as to place over them a rude boy. Know you the Knight the Prince has summoned to his side?'

'Well I know him,' answered De Courcy; 'it is Falkes de Breauté. There is not a more worthless and dissolute knight living. Yes,' he added, half to himself; 'I know him well, though more by repute than personally. When I was with Prince Richard in Gascony, I scarce know how he managed to ingratiate himself at Stoke Courcy; he affected, or pretended to affect, my elder sister, Alice Margaret.'

'What! she who married the Earl of Devon?'

'The same, my Lord; and thankful was I that some special piece of rascality

opened my mother's eyes to De Breauté's true character, and made her forbid him the Castle. Alice was shortly afterwards sought in marriage by the Earl of Devon ; and not only for his own worth, but to save my sister from further molestation, my mother joyfully consented. If Prince John is in any way entrusted to De Breauté, a rare master has he in the art of villainy.'

They halted on their way at the seats of Norman Barons or Irish chieftains, and the caprice and insolence of the Prince and his attendants were such that it was difficult for those in command to keep their patience. De Courcy spoke earnestly to Giraldus, and entreated him to use such influence as he had to persuade the Prince to show some species of courtesy. And the learned monk made some ineffectual remonstrance more than once ; but, as he himself said, interference only served to make Prince John more reckless, and at last, to rid himself of his importunity, he

offered De Barri the richest Irish bishopric he would have, or two of them if he so willed; and bid him keep his exhortations for the Irish, who knew not how to appreciate the honour done them in the presence of their King's son. Giraldus laughed, but made no answer, and De Courcy's brow grew dark.

They stayed one night at Dublin, and the next day pushed on to Meath. At the Castle gate were assembled a stately gathering, and at the entrance of the Castle itself stood the Lady de Lacy, with her eldest son, Walter, attended by a large retinue. With her was the Lady de Courcy, suitably attended, and both the ladies attired in their richest robes to welcome the King's son, the Lord of Ireland. The Lady Una, in right of her husband's position, of course took the foremost place, but the Prince had hardly dismounted before he mortally offended her by paying her the scantest courtesy, and devoting his attention entirely to the Lady Elfrica, who

was both younger and fairer. She herself would gladly have avoided them, and her husband longed to shield her from the insolent attentions, and broadly expressed admiration of the Prince; but with such a youth it seemed a mere affectation of prudery to take any steps to prevent it; and Elfrica was compelled to receive his compliments with as good a grace as she could, knowing that the Lady de Lacy was raging inwardly.

At the evening meal the Prince was seated in the chair of state with the two ladies, one on each side of him, but his whole attention was given to Elfrica, and by so doing he managed to make himself equally objectionable to them, and to annoy both their husbands. Hugh de Lacy would have been less than a man not to feel hurt at the way in which his wife was slighted, while De Courcy, though with his perfect love and trust in Elfrica he would have allowed the whole world to pay her attention without even a thought of jealousy,

yet was vexed to see her annoyed, as well as profoundly hurt at the slight put upon his old friend.

After the ladies had retired, De Lacy insisted upon the Prince being serious for a few moments, and then informed him that on the morrow there would be a gathering of the northern chieftains, when they would pay their homage in the great hall of the Castle, and that after the ceremony there would be a banquet. Prince John was barely civil; he did not relish the idea of the tedious ceremony, and would far rather have been employed in hunting them like wild animals than in receiving them as guests. Sulkily he grumbled something about a day's hunting and some sport with the Irish hounds. De Lacy answered that there would be time enough later on for hunting, but that till he had conciliated the chiefs and received their homage, it would be scarcely safe for him to go far into the country, though, he added, with a certain stately and not un-

becoming pride, the Irish were never so well affected as at present, and at Meath, as he could testify, and at Doune, as he knew from his friend Sir John de Courcy, he would meet with chiefs as loyal and faithful to the King as any of the Barons of England or Normandy.

Prince John listened impatiently, and meanwhile, unseen by Sir Hugh de Lacy, one of the scapegrace young nobles was mimicking his gestures, exaggerating the slight limp caused by a wound in early life, which he had never quite overcome. The consequence was that the Prince, though for a few moments overawed by the old man's gravity and decision, was half his time trying to suppress a laugh—and when De Lacy had finished, he gave a prodigious yawn, and declared he should go to rest.

The riotous crew were safely disposed of, but the Knights were unable to relieve their indignation as Falkes de Breauté and some few others of the Prince's older at-

tendants remained. After a short talk on the ceremonial of the next day, the chaplain, to De Breauté's undisguised astonishment, announced it to be the hour of Compline, and they proceeded to the chapel; then, after a cup of spiced wine handed round, the Knights sought their couches, the chaplain taking charge of Giraldus.

But De Lacy was not even allowed the repose he so much needed—for the Lady Una poured forth the wrath which she had hitherto been obliged to suppress upon his devoted head for having subjected her to such treatment. The Prince, she said, showed her naught but insult and disdain —and then she raged and fumed at the conceit and forwardness of the gentle Elfrica, at her pretensions to beauty, etc., etc. Poor Sir Hugh could not help wondering whether Eveline ever treated Damian to such curtain lectures. He knew enough of the mutual happiness of John de Courcy and his wife to know that with him such midnight storms were im-

possible. But his anxiety for the next day overpowered even the annoyance caused by his wife's ill-humour, and long after the Lady Una had grumbled herself to sleep did Hugh de Lacy fret his soul as to the probable result of the next day's ceremonial. But, alas! even his anxiety never foreboded the half of what took place—destroying the confidence and good-will which he and his fellow-labourers had striven so hard to produce, and blowing to the winds the fabric of order and good government they had created.

The morning rose, brilliant and promising. De Lacy—in spite of his sleepless night—and De Courcy were early astir, helping forward and superintending all needful preparations.

De Lacy's chair of state was covered with crimson cloth, and set in the large entrance hall, and overhead was suspended the elegant crown of peacock's feathers braided with gold which had been sent by the Pope to King Henry seven years be-

fore as a symbol of the Sovereignty of Ireland, which the Pope claimed the right to dispose of. At the same time the King was permitted to bestow it on either son he pleased.

The morning mass had been said, and the first meal partaken of, yet neither the Prince nor any of his retinue had appeared, save Gerald de Barri and young Hugh de Lacy, who dared not slight his father's orders in his own castle. John Cuming, the Archbishop of Dublin, who had been detained the night before by pressing business, had arrived. He was attired in his magnificent ecclesiastical robes, and accompanied by a train of priests both Regular and Secular. His dignity was not a little shocked on being told that the Prince had not yet put in an appearance: after a short delay, he requested that he should be informed of his arrival. An elderly attendant was sent with the message; on his return he hesitated in giving the Prince's answer, but on being pressed,

reluctantly and indignantly repeated Prince John's own words, that he 'was delighted to hear it, and hoped the old man was well!'

'This insolence passes belief,' said the Archbishop.

'Scarcely so,' answered De Lacy; 'had your Grace been here yesterday, you would have known what to expect.'

At this moment appeared Sir Falkes de Breauté, who 'wished to know whether Sir Hugh de Lacy were accustomed to starve his guests?'

'We have broken our fast, Sir Knight, some hours ago, and there is a nooning spread, in case the Irish chieftains should delay our ordinary repast. Had the Prince been indisposed, and desired to break his fast in his own apartments, I supposed that one of his attendants would have requested it.'

'Well, sir, I am his attendant, and I request it.'

De Lacy turned on his heel and gave

the necessary orders. Meanwhile De Courcy spoke:

'Is the Prince aware, sir, that not only the Lord Deputy, but his Grace the Archbishop of Dublin await his appearance?'

'And pray, sir,' said De Breauté, turning towards De Courcy with an insolent stare, 'who are you?'

'You know me full well, De Breauté. I am John de Courcy.'

'Then, John de Courcy, you have made me wait ere now; and now you may wait mine or the Prince's pleasure.'

'I spoke not, sir, of myself, but of his Grace of Dublin.'

'And I care not, nor does Prince John, were it the Pope. As for the Lord Deputy, I know him not; I saw the Baron of Meath here anon.'

'De Breauté,' said De Courcy, repressing with a strong effort his indignation, 'wherefore the King chose you to accompany the Prince, you yourself perhaps best know, but this much is sure, that, an ye do

not constrain him to show more of courtesy to the Irish chieftains than you have shown to Norman Barony of high degree, it will be ill for Ireland and for England too. But my present duty is to assist in receiving the native Princes, and endeavour to conceal the discourtesy of the Prince.' He turned from De Breauté, and, assisted by Sir Almeric de Tristram, joined De Lacy and other knights in welcoming the chiefs.

They came, each attended by as numerous and splendid a retinue as the terms of the invitation allowed him to bring. Though displeased at seeing the English Archbishop assigned a higher position than themselves, yet they greeted him with respect as a dignified ecclesiastic. All had taken their seats, and then came a pause, relieved only by De Lacy's attendants carrying round refreshments, and the Knights endeavouring to entertain their guests by lively conversation. But in spite of the attention paid to them, an

ominous silence fell on the assembly, and it was plain how keenly the chiefs felt the indignity with which the Prince treated them.

Just as De Lacy and his friends began to fear an outburst of indignation, the doors rolled back and the Prince entered with his train; at the same moment, in the gallery above, appeared the ladies, the Lady Una having arranged that she would not enter the hall till the Prince made his appearance.

Apparently De Breauté had schooled the Prince into some show of civility, for he came in cap in hand, he bowed to the ladies, though taking care to show that his courtesy was intended entirely for the Lady de Courcy. After paying his respects to the Archbishop, the Prince was requested to make a tour of the hall, before he seated himself to receive the homage of the chiefs. This he did, but scarcely had he begun his tour, when behaviour more like that of rude and ill-trained schoolboys

was shown. At first the Prince walked a little in advance, attended by De Lacy, who introduced each chieftain by name; but, after a little, wearied of the sameness, he turned to those of his young companions who followed him, and, scarce making even a pretence of hiding his mirth, by rude speeches and ill-mannered gestures, he made it apparent that he looked upon the whole affair as a farce: he criticised and burlesqued the quaint appearance of the Keltic magnates, and the rudeness was so manifest that De Lacy did his best to shorten the procession as much as possible.

As soon as the Prince was seated, the ceremony of doing homage began. De Lacy, as the first in rank—in fact, holding still the position of Lord Deputy, for he had never been formally recalled or displaced—did homage for his Barony of Meath, being followed by De Courcy, Sir Almeric de Tristram, and all who held directly from the King. At this part of the ceremonial, which was of course no

new one to the Prince, he retained at least the appearance of civility; but when the Irish chiefs came in their turn, one by one, in their ancient Keltic dress and long beards, making such a contrast to the shaven and beardless faces of the Normans, he, paying no attention to their displeased and sullen demeanour, received them with smothered laughter, and with a ridicule he made no attempt even to conceal, whilst the rude lads, his companions, burst into peals of ill-timed merriment.

They came, the deposed Kings, without their golden circlets, but still wearing their collars and bracelets of gold. Each knelt in turn before Prince John, and took the oath of submission. There was Urick, Chief of Conach, and Deruntius, Lord of Cork, and Terence of Uriel, and Duvenald of Ossory, Duvenald, also, of Limerick, and many another name of ancient Irish lineage. Princes, both lay and ecclesiastical, in turn came and took the oath. At first, some sort of order was preserved,

but at last, either the Prince was wearied, or his young companions were making fun of his comparative gravity, and when a venerable chief appeared, whose age alone should have shielded him from insult, the Prince ventured to stroke his beard, and as with a stern and displeased, though most dignified air, he put it aside, one of the young nobles twitched it on the other side. He angrily drew his sword, as if to avenge the insult. De Lacy came forward and apologized for the boyish insolence.

'It had been well if these unmannerly cubs had at least been taught respect for the aged,' said the chief.

But now, in spite of the Archbishop, in spite of De Breauté himself, in spite of mutterings deep and loud, of clashing of arms, of deep cursings, of bitter invectives, each chief had his dress twitched from side to side, his beard pulled, and then had to run the gauntlet of insolent and annoying remarks. Nothing but the sight of the English force, and the number of the

Baron's retainers, prevented a terrible outburst of crime and bloodshed.

It was over at last. Prince John threw himself back in his chair with a loud laugh, and then yawned to show what a bore he thought the whole affair. Meanwhile De Lacy, with a stern and displeased air at the insults which he considered as great to himself as to the Irish, went among the chiefs, and by his grave courtesy and ample apologies, endeavoured to efface the impression that had been created. He was seconded by De Courcy's hearty voice and cheerful tones as he endeavoured to soothe their irritated feelings, while Sir Almeric, with his exquisite grace and mournful sweetness, and the pathetic ring of his voice, begged them to believe that the way they had been treated gave even more pain to their hosts than to themselves.

They were entreated to remain and partake of the banquet prepared.

'Neither bit nor sup will I taste in this

place, where I and my race have received such insults,' said the hoary-headed chieftain. 'I took the oath because I had pledged my word, but I swear now, by the heaven above, by the bones of St. Patrick, by the soil of old Ireland, that never, never will I rest till these false-hearted invaders are driven from the soil! May God's curse light on ye all!'

The old man brandished his sword, and for a moment there was a rush forward to attack him, but De Courcy held his huge sword in front of him.

'Let the old man go in safety,' said he. 'Shame, shame on him who has done the wrong;' and he looked full in the Prince's face. The Irish crowded around the old chief; they clashed their arms together and passed out.

In bitter wrath the Barons stood together, while John and his companions laughed at the commotion they had made; but when he saw the dark faces and stern looks of the nobles, the Prince announced

his intention of returning to Dublin Castle, which he understood was prepared for his reception. He offered to accompany the Archbishop on his return, but he coldly replied that he had arranged to pay a visit of some days to his friend the Baron de Lacy. The Prince then requested in a tone that implied command that Sir Almeric de Tristram would escort him, but he answered that he had engaged to accompany and return with the Sieur de Courcy. He added, however, that he should probably be shortly at Howth.

And now Sir John de Courcy addressed the Baron de Lacy. He said that whilst regretting the necessity, he felt that it was expedient that in the present state of affairs each Baron should be in his own lordship, to allay as far as possible the ill-will caused by the late occurrences.

Sir Hugh de Lacy grieved much to lose his young friend, but he could not but feel that his decision was right, as it was necessary that he should be on the spot

when the return of the chiefs would make known their grievances, and disaffection would spread, so that he might be prepared at once to conciliate and overawe the whole of Ulster.

De Courcy sought his wife, and told her his intention of returning at once.

'I am so glad, John,' she said. 'Were it not for the good old Baron, I would never wish to come here again.'

'Hush, my darling! Walls have ears, they say. You do not think, then, that the Lady Una wishes you to stay?'

'Oh no! I do but make her worse. I do not of course wonder at her indignation at the Prince's behaviour, but in some mysterious way she seems to think that I am answerable for it all. Will you accompany me to bid her farewell, for I dare not face her alone?'

De Courcy attended her, but was shocked at the furious expression on the Lady de Lacy's face. She greeted them with—

'So, sir, the valiant Knight Sir John de

Courcy leaves his friend to make what shift he can in coping with the disturbance he has helped to create.'

'No, madame; deeply as I grieve for what has taken place to-day, I feel sure that our duty is, each in his own lordship, to strive as much as may be to allay the ill-feeling that this folly has caused.'

'And pray, sir, I would know how any knight or gentleman could stand by and see my countrymen insulted—nay, myself too; to be set aside in my own Castle because I am of Irish blood, for a fair-faced chit like that!'

'I am come, madame, with my wife, the Lady Elfrica, to bid you adieu; and I pledge my word that the Lady de Courcy shall never interfere with the respect due to the Lady de Lacy.'

The angry woman could find no words to answer De Courcy. She barely touched Elfrica's hand, and scantily returning De Courcy's salutation, turned away. They asked for Sir Hugh de Lacy; he came to

them in their own apartment, and said with a sigh:

'You are ready, I see, to depart.'

'My Lord, if I can help you, we will tay even now.'

'No, De Courcy, there will be risings all over the country. What could possess the King to send that wilful lad here? Heaven knows how it will end! But it's a sad finish to all one's work.'

De Courcy looked anxiously at the old man; it seemed as if old age had come upon him with a bound. His early service in France and Wales, his three years in Palestine, a phase of disappointed love in mature years, his anxieties and hard work in Ireland, the King's jealousy and distrust—nay, even his ill-assorted marriage, with its consequence of ill-trained children, not one nor all of these had so aged the Baron as this one night and day of bitter grief and disappointment. His work in Ireland had come at a time when he wanted a change and occupation for his

mind ; and in spite of the fact that his wife had been no helpmeet for him, he had striven to look upon his marriage as part of the self-denial he had vowed, and at her wilfulness as part of the Irish character with which he had to cope. He had had the satisfaction of seeing good order evolved out of the chaos he found when he undertook the work, and was looked up to with respect, not unmingled with affection, by the Irish themselves ; but he knew well the fickleness of their nature, and that years of labour would not restore the good understanding that this morning's work had upset.

'My Lord,' said De Courcy, 'it is deserting you to go at this pinch.'

'No, De Courcy, no ; you will be more real help to me at Doune ; and if, as I fear, this Princeling goes on increasing the ill-will he has already caused, it will be far better you should keep up your own good government there. God be with you, my lad, and bless you, my sweet lady,' he

said, taking Elfrica's tiny hand in his own large serviceable one. 'Nay, He *has* blessed you in each other.'

'Adieu, my dear Lord!' and as she looked up into his face with great sweetness she added, 'Believe me, I will never strive to keep back my husband when he is needed.'

The old Baron bent and kissed her forehead; then, placing his hand upon De Courcy's shoulder, he said:

'There; take her and guard her well. Be thankful for the treasure that you have, and may ye be long spared to each other.'

It was then hurriedly arranged that Sir Almeric should remain with De Lacy till the Prince left, and then return to his own barony of Howth. Sir Almeric being a widower, there was no jealousy to be feared from the Lady de Lacy, and his graceful courtesy was gratifying to her wounded pride. And Elfrica, though regarding him as a dear brother, was yet

proud to show how safe she felt herself in the guardianship of her husband alone.

There was still the least agreeable duty left of making their farewells to the Prince. He barely spoke to De Courcy, but assured Elfrica that all the beauty and grace of the country went with her, and that now there was nothing to detain him from Dublin, where he purposed to go immediately. De Courcy and his lady made no response, but in their hearts secretly congratulated the Baron on the loss of his guest.

CHAPTER III.

THE END OF A NOBLE LIFE.

It was some months before Ireland was relieved from the incubus of Prince John's presence. It was not till news came to the King that all Ireland was ripe for rebellion that he was obliged to believe the mischief that was being done, and an express from England desired Sir John de Courcy to betake himself thither with all speed, to hold conference with the King.

Even the mild constraint which Giraldus exercised, which amounted, in fact, rather to a witness than to anything like control, was felt as a burden by the Prince, who, finding that he could not release himself

from his oversight, as the King himself had appointed him his secretary, offered him two bishoprics, and when Giraldus declined, offered to consolidate the rich sees of Fernes and Leighlin, if he would accept them; but Giraldus nobly refused the proposal, saying:

'If I could improve and exalt the Church of Ireland, I would willingly accept the proffered honour; but since that cannot be expected, I had rather continue a private person than be raised to a high station where I can be of no service.'

Meanwhile, it was a weary time for Sir Hugh de Lacy and his brave assistants at their various posts. De Lacy had vowed that never again should Prince John enter his barony of Meath, and heart-sick was he when he found himself obliged to check, by acts of what seemed cruel repression, the rebellion which had been wantonly and wilfully provoked, and had to order the execution of men who,

before the Prince's arrival, had been good and loyal subjects.

In Ulster De Courcy did not suffer so much; the powerful measures that he had taken on his return had prevented the spirit of revolt spreading, and he hastened to assure the natives that the ignorant petulance of a boy was not the act of the King, nor was it sanctioned by the rulers they knew and trusted. Elfrica assisted much in the work of soothing the troubled spirits. She held receptions, when the bright welcome she gave to all who attended them won all hearts; and by promoting the people's pleasures, and taking part in their festivals, did more, so her husband said, than himself in pacifying Ulster.

But in other parts of the country, in Munster and Connaught, where the personal influence of De Lacy and De Courcy was less felt, Prince John and his riotous crew pursued their licentious and insolent behaviour unchecked, till at last the rising

of the chiefs and the murmurs of the peasantry made themselves heard, and they found that they were in imminent danger. Though attended by a guard of soldiers trained in foreign wars, the Irish were no despicable antagonists ; the broad and heavy axes of the men-at-arms, the dexterity of the slingers, and their short lances for close quarters, made them formidable opponents. Their axes were of such weight and metal, that they would crash through the best-tempered steel armour ; and more than once an Irish champion had been known to lop off at one blow the thigh of a knight or squire, the whole limb falling on one side of the horse, and the expiring body on the other.

And now the hatred with which Prince John's followers were regarded was fast spreading, with an utter want of discrimination, to all the English strangers, and complaints were sent from every quarter to the King, at the same time that Prince John was compelled, by fear for his own

safety, to convene a council, to which he was obliged to summon some of the elder knights. De Lacy's attendance was commanded, but he refused to go; De Courcy was on his way to England; but Sir Almeric de Tristram and Sir John Savage and others attended. And then, what to a youth with a grain of fine feeling would have been indeed a bitter pill to swallow, Prince John had to confess that his own excesses and the enormities of his followers had provoked the rising against him.

Sour and angry was the Prince's countenance when he learned that a special messenger had arrived at Doune, desiring Sir John de Courcy's instant departure for England.

'Any man but *he* had been better,' he said.

'Sir,' said Sir Almeric de Tristram, 'there is no such renowned leader, no such brave soldier, no more upright gentleman, than my brother De Courcy; and the

King has done well in consulting with the wisest and the best.'

The Prince scowled, but was not ready with an answer. Sir Almeric then offered, with the self-denying chivalry that was part of his nature, to be answerable for the Prince's safety till orders came from the King; and when Sir John Savage suggested that his post was either at Howth or Doune, he answered:

'Sir Hugh de Lacy and my dear brother have kept such good order, that I am in no fear for the north, and a good knight's post is ever where there is the greatest danger.'

On Sir John de Courcy's urgent summons from the King, he hastened first to Meath, in order himself, with the noble truthfulness of his character, to tell Sir Hugh de Lacy of his errand.

'It is well,' said the old warrior. 'If I am to be again superseded, I would choose you of all men, De Courcy; and

you will not make the old man feel too keenly the being laid aside.'

De Courcy grasped his old friend's hand, and said :

'I will never believe, my Lord, that my duty to my sovereign can interfere with my loyal respect and friendship for my master in war and policy.'

De Courcy had refused to take Elfrica with him in this hurried journey ; but Sir Almeric had begged him to take his eldest son as his squire, that he might, if occasion offered, bestow him in the household of some valiant knight, where he might acquire the polish and training to be gained alone in foreign service.

'Father,' said Nicholas, 'what better masters in valour and chivalry can I have than you and my uncle ?'

'My boy, you will believe how hard it is for me to part with you ; but if there is aught to admire in my brother and me, remember that I would give you the advantages and training that we ourselves had.'

The boy bent his knee to receive his father's blessing, and long did Sir Almeric's eyes rest on the receding figures of the two beings he loved best on earth.

But he had to hasten to the council, of which some account has been already given. It was an anxious time, but there was great cause for thankfulness that the King was willing to hear the truth from one of his trusty knights, instead of listening to the misrepresentations and falsehoods that would have been made by Prince John or one of his followers.

In his interviews with the King, De Courcy simply stated bare facts, leaving the King to draw his own inferences; but even so, the plain unvarnished tale was bad enough. Where confidence and loyalty had prevailed, there was now rampant rebellion, hatred, and distrust. De Courcy begged that Sir Hugh de Lacy might be reinstated as Lord Deputy; but here Henry was inflexible.

'He has dared my son to enter the

boundaries of Meath; he has refused to come to his assistance; nay, he has defied my authority, and is himself a rebel. No, De Courcy; your father was a trusted friend of mine, and died fighting by my side. You I trust, for I believe you to be as loyal as he was; and De Lacy will owe it to you if I do not recall him and treat him as a traitor. I place the government of Ireland in your hands, and trust to you to take such measures as you deem fit to bring it into subjection.'

De Courcy was then told that his commission should be made out at once, and a sum of money granted him to raise the necessary forces. The King also promised that an accredited messenger should accompany him to take the orders for the Prince's immediate return.

While these arrangements were being carried out, De Courcy managed to find time to pay his mother a hurried visit at Stoke, and to consign his nephew to the care of his dear old friend Sir Henry de

Louvelle, begging him to seek out some knight of high character to whom Nicholas might be entrusted for training in chivalry and experience in war and government. He told him of the boy's own anxious wish to remain with his father.

'I am not sure that I do not agree with the lad,' said Sir Henry.

'Forgive my differing from you, my dear old master; but with all the fine points in the Irish character, there is an element of savagery in them; and were we to remain there without fresh and chivalrous blood being continually poured in, we should sink to their level. I think, too, my brother has another reason. The loss of his wife—my sister—has made him a grave and saddened man. Nicholas is devoted to his father; and he, I can see, fears the effect of continued depression upon so young and sensitive a nature.'

'You may be right, De Courcy; but had I a son, I would wish for no better training for him than yours and De Tristram's.'

De Courcy was sending messages to his old friend, when Sir Henry asked him did he not know that De Briwere was to accompany him, and bear the order for Prince John's recall? And now De Courcy had to hasten back to London to complete his preparations, and return with all speed to Ireland. Everything was in a forward state, and having received his commission, he and De Briwere set sail. Their talk was not of the present, but the past, and principally of their boyish days; and then, as their hearts opened to each other, De Courcy spoke of his happy marriage, and of his sweet wife, and he would know why De Briwere did not marry. He owned that he loved, but his love was set high. Beatrix de Valle was a widow; she had been wife to Reginald, Earl of Cornwall, one of Henry I.'s numerous family. He had married late in life the beautiful Beatrix de Valle. She was still young, and had large possessions, and it was generally supposed that the King would

bestow her hand on one of his favoured knights.'

'She is fair and virtuous,' said De Briwere, 'and has ever shown me great favour and respect.'

'I trust she will make thee a good wife,' said De Courcy; and then they went back again to old times, and in their talk of these they never tired, and the Lord of Isle de Briwere and Burgh-Walter became once more little Will Bruyère, who looked up to John de Courcy as the wisest, bravest, and best fellow in the world. And De Courcy forgot the man of the world, the wily politician by his side, and believed him to be once more the little Will who came to him in every trouble.

But as they approached the Irish shore De Briwere relapsed into the grave statesman, whilst on De Courcy's brow sat anxious expectation. They landed; De Courcy's banner was unfurled and planted, and the troops drawn up on either side. Then the commission was read appointing

him Governor of Ireland, and giving him authority to put down rebellion, to restore order, to redress grievances, and to reduce the country to obedience.

After this ceremony was over, a small troop was sent to conduct De Briwere to Connaught, where Prince John was; while De Courcy sent a trusty messenger to Elfrica to tell her of his safe return, but to warn her that it might be long ere she saw him.

And now began the hardest work of De Courcy's life. He seemed to be ubiquitous; everywhere he made his presence felt. A few sharp examples he had to make, in order to show that he was in earnest; he was nobly seconded by his lieutenants. The people soon found how even-handed his justice was; he punished injustice and cruelty as severely—nay, more so—amongst the Norman and English settlers as he did rebellion or disobedience amongst the Irish. Every complaint was listened to, every act of good faith and

trustworthiness acknowledged, and, when possible, rewarded; and gradually the people began to realize that they were governed upon an intelligible plan—that their rights were preserved and their loyalty respected. When, too, they fully understood that Sir John de Courcy meant what he said, and would keep his word at all hazard, the work was half done. It was a work that was achieved at the cost of almost superhuman exertion, but achieved it was; so that, as the Irish themselves said, 'A man with a wand having treasure about him might travel through the country with safety'* whilst De Courcy was Governor of Erin.

But meanwhile nothing was heard from Meath. De Courcy would not pain the old man by flaunting his authority in his face, and trusted that he would send for assistance if he required it; but many an anxious thought was cast upon him, and many a wish that they could see and help

* Burke's 'Peerage.'

him. De Courcy knew that Sir Hugh never blamed him personally, but he knew also that he was deeply pained at the contempt with which he had been treated, and at the ignoring of his past services. He never recognised De Courcy's authority, but kept up an independent government of his own.

It was long since De Courcy had paid his home a visit of any length; but now, to his own great rest and ease, and to Elfrica's joy, there seemed a probability of his being able to spend some time at Doune.

It was a bright summer's evening, and he and Elfrica were pacing the terrace, while the younger sons of Sir Almeric de Tristram and other youths were practising their military exercises in the Castle-yard, whilst Miles was imitating them with a reed, when they saw a man-at-arms riding at full gallop towards the Castle. De Courcy strode forwards to hear the news, for the headlong speed at which the horse-

man rode betokened news of grave import.

In a moment he came back with a blanched and troubled face.

'I must go, Elfrica, and at once.'

'Does Sir Hugh want aid, dearest? I promised never even to try to detain you when you were needed.'

'I *must* go, Elfrica. But our good old friend is past human aid.'

'Alas! alas! John, what is it?'

'I may not wait, my wife. This good friend will tell you all;' and Sir John hastened away, too much moved to say more.

Then Elfrica heard the terrible tale. The punishments for rebellion that De Lacy, though unwillingly, had had to inflict had made him very unpopular; and now that he was no longer armed with the King's commission he lost the prestige of his high rank and position as Lord Deputy. In fact, he was as much in rebellion against the King as the Irish themselves;

and in order to keep up his authority, even in his barony of Meath, he was compelled to build fresh castles ; whilst to the native race each one of these was an eye-sore and a burden—a fresh rivet in their chains of servitude.

It was in the lake district of West Meath, not far from Lough Lene, on the banks of a little river now called, from this very Castle, Strongfort, and which runs into Lough Dervanagh, that Sir Hugh de Lacy was himself superintending the building of the fortress. As the men were digging out the foundations, the bell had rung for their noontide meal ; but one fellow was working so carelessly, so manifestly with the determination *not* to do what he was doing, that he was bid to stay behind the others. De Lacy took up the pickaxe one of the men had thrown down, and using both hands stooped forward to show him how to do the work. The man sullenly stood by. Whether he yielded to the sudden prompting of some

demon, or whether he was only watching his opportunity, who can tell? But as the old Knight bent low, the man seized his axe, and in an instant with one stroke severed his head from his body. Then, grasping the head by the hair and brandishing his axe, he leaped the ditch and escaped into the woods before De Lacy's followers, who saw the act from a distance, could reach the spot.

At the fearful termination to the tale, Elfrica uttered a cry of horror. The man added:

'And now, madame, we are without a leader. The Lady de Lacy, they say, is nearly out of her mind, and—and——'

'I see,' said the Lady de Courcy. 'Sir John is wanted, and at once. But is it, think you, a token of a wide-spread rebellion?'

'I think not, madame; it is but the savage act of a ruffian, though of course it is a sign of the discontent and ill-feeling caused by the Prince's behaviour last year.

There are those who talk nonsense about the English enslaving the land; but we know that the land is far more *really* free than when it was at the mercy of any savage chieftain, and their constant wars with each other made the country a wilderness. But now we are without a head, and look to Sir John de Courcy to maintain in Meath the order and good government that he has produced elsewhere.'

But Elfrica, having heard the story, could not spare time even to hear her dear Lord's praises, sweet as they were to her ears, and she grudged every moment that she did not spend with him; so giving orders that the messenger's comfort should be well cared for, she hastened away to find her husband.

He greeted her with that look of full confidence and affection that gave her a fresh joy every time she met it. But he was anxious to speak to her of graver matters: he told her that he thought it well that she should show herself more

prominently in his absence, the length of which he could not guess.

'But will not Sir Bertram be here?'

'Yes,' he replied; 'but, my darling, Sir Bertram is growing old, and Miles is very young; and, dearest, what has happened to Sir Hugh may befall me any day, and I wish the people to be accustomed to take their orders from you.'

She looked up at him with a white face and streaming eyes.

'God would not let me live without you, John.'

'And our child, Elfrica?'

'God's will be done. I will try to do all you wish,' she said.

Whilst he was explaining his wishes more fully to her, a messenger came to say that all was in readiness. Edgitha brought the boy; he fondled and blessed him.

'May God and the saints watch over you both, my darlings!' he said, as he clasped her in his arms. She slid from them to her knees as he turned away, and

continued thus till she heard, from the sounds below, that they were about to start. Then she rose and went to the casement; he looked up and saluted with his sword, and she waved her kerchief, and then, with scarce restrained tears, watched him as far as her eyes could follow.

The time passed on. Elfrica showed herself constantly, riding with a small troop from post to post, accompanied by Miles on his pony. She encouraged the soldiers, rewarded any special deed of bravery or endurance, redoubled her usual courtesy to the natives, and testified by manner as well as word that she did not consider the isolated act of a low ruffian the act of the Irish people. Daily, both in her private chapel and in St. Patrick's Cathedral, did she pour forth prayers for her husband's safety, for her child, for the land of her adoption, and last of all for herself.

So busy were her days divided between

her public and her household cares, her loving watch over, not only her own child but the other youths entrusted to their care, that she had little time to feel desolate and lonely; and the active life she led, in obedience to her husband's wish, brought its own reward in sweet peace and absence of fretting or despondency.

It was about two months after the news of Sir Hugh de Lacy's murder, that a warder from the Castle-wall announced the approach of a company with De Courcy's banner displayed; it was a larger troop, he said, than his Lord had set out with, but it would be still an hour before they could arrive. Many and rapid were the orders given by the Lady de Courcy for the hospitable reception of her Lord and his guests; but amidst all her duties she found time to array herself in the sea-green robes that De Courcy loved best. Then with her attendants she awaited his arrival at the great entrance, whilst Miles insisted on taking his post

with his cousins and the other lads, instead of with his mother and her maidens.

The train now wound in sight, and foremost of the troop rode De Courcy. By his side was a knight of middle age, but with a graceful figure that gave him an appearance of youth: his handsome features, too, were marked by an expression that betokened alike nobility of soul and nobility of birth. De Courcy sprang from his horse, which was held by John de Tristram, and clasped his lady in his arms. For a moment she clung to him, and then, his arm still round her, he led her forward, and said:

'Elfrica, let me make known to you the noble Knight, Sir Damian de Lacy, nephew to our late dear Lord and his most trusted kinsman: Sir Knight, my wife.'

Low bowed the Knight, as he kissed the fair hand extended to him. De Courcy looked around for his son, and to his great amusement discovered him standing like a statue among the youths drawn up to

receive and welcome him home; but as soon as Miles found that he was recognised, he burst forth with a joyous shout, and received his father's caress and blessing.

After they had refreshed themselves, the Lady Elfrica anxiously asked for tidings. They were better than could have been hoped. The Lady Una, it was true, abandoned herself to the most passionate grief; but she had lost, at least for the time, the air of defiance and distrust with which she had always treated De Courcy. She appeared to depend entirely upon him, and in part at least to be guided by his advice. The two youths, Walter and Hugh, were both cowed and softened by the suddenness of the blow that had fallen. The arrival of Sir Damian had been a great satisfaction to De Courcy, who, in the arrangements that he made, acted with the perfect concurrence of the most esteemed member of the late Lord's family.

Walter, the eldest son, professed himself quite willing to recognise De Courcy's

position, and altogether things looked favourable and hopeful; and deeply as the good old man's death was deplored, it put an end to the anomalous position in which the barony of Meath had now been for some time; and tragic as his death was, it could scarcely be called premature. The great danger was whether the Lady Una's influence upon her sons would be good, and whether these half-educated and semi-civilized young men would not succumb to the lowering influences around them, and end by becoming more Irish than the Irish themselves, and gain *their* vices without their compensating virtues. But as the Lady Elfrica ever said,

'Let us hope for the best.'

There was necessarily a gravity over the party assembled at Doune, and much they spoke of the excellent qualities of Sir Hugh de Lacy.

'I owe him much,' said De Courcy.

'And I,' said Elfrica. 'He ever treated me as a daughter.'

He looked at her, and said:

'Yes, it is more true to say that *we* owe him much: his rule, though strict, was kind, and he always trusted those who held any post under him. And to be mistrusted was what he could not bear.

'That,' said Sir Damian, 'was the keynote to my uncle's character. My uncle ever trusted those he employed, and no bitterness was to him so great as having to mistrust those in whom he had placed confidence. I have good reason to know this.'

Their guest stayed with them some days. He had vainly endeavoured to persuade the Lady Una to allow her younger son Hugh, at least, to return with him; but she would not hear of being separated from either of her sons, and it was much to be feared what the result of her injudicious fondness would be. The sight of Sir John de Courcy's well-ordered household seemed a refreshment to Sir Damian's spirits; and one day, when the

two Knights were pacing the terrace together, he said:

'I do not wonder, De Courcy, at your joyful return to such a home as this. Your country here is even more lovely than mine in Wales, and, till now, I had thought myself exceptionally happy in my married life: but your sweet lady has made me know and believe that there are others as blessed as myself. When next you come to England, you must visit the Garde Douloureuse, and the Lady Elfrica and my Eveline will become fast friends, though my wife is now a matron of mature years.'

'Glad shall we be to accept your hospitality, Sir Knight; and I can answer for Elfrica's delight at meeting with the heroine of the Garde Douloureuse.'

'Ah! know you our story?' said Sir Damian. 'It is a pretty tale for a romance.'

'No,' answered De Courcy, 'your uncle was reserved on the subject of his early years, and did not invite curiosity. I

know but that if a noble knight were named by our late good friend, it was the highest compliment that he could pay, to compare him to his kinsman Sir Damian de Lacy; while, if he spoke of a fair lady whose truth and fidelity were unquestioned, he ever compared her (if the Lady Una were not by) to the Lady Eveline.'

'And yet he never told you more?'

'No,' said De Courcy; 'I say not that no rumour reached us, but we never heard the tale told as it happened.'

Elfrica drew near. She was passing on, as if afraid of disturbing the Knights in their talk. But Sir Damian said:

'You must not let me drive you away, dear lady. I was but about to tell your husband a tale of true love and of self-devotion, to which few bards or minstrels could do justice. If you care to hear it, I shall be proud to tell it you.'

'I can answer for her,' said De Courcy, as he placed her on a raised seat of turf,

and throwing himself on the greensward at her feet, his example was followed by Sir Damian, who almost immediately began his tale.

'You, who were such true friends of my late dear uncle, may be glad to know how nobly he treated the two beings whom, I well believe, he loved best on earth, and, alas! alas! how was he requited?'

'Not by ingratitude on your part, Sir Knight, I am sure!'

'Thanks, dear lady, for your good opinion. No, thank God, personally, neither Eveline nor I have to reproach ourselves in the matter. The story is briefly this: In her sixteenth year Eveline de Berenger was promised in marriage to my uncle, who was then forty years of age. She had met him but once, and looked upon him even then as an elderly man. Her father being killed in a skirmish with the Welsh, my uncle came to her assistance. He defeated the enemy, and rescued her father's body. Being then

under a vow for the Crusades, which included his never sleeping under a roof till his pilgrim-warfare was accomplished, he was compelled to leave to me the arrangements for bringing home the body of the noble Berenger, and the attending his funeral. I was then but a lad of twenty, and in carrying out his commands I had more than one interview with Eveline; her subdued grief, her great beauty, and her stately graciousness, with the necessary dependence upon myself, as my uncle's representative, won my heart. Small wonder was it that I fell passionately in love with her, and she—as she has since acknowledged—she too loved.'

Sir Damian's face glowed with thoughts of long years ago; but, after a few moments' pause, he continued:

'My uncle begged an interview, and she—partly in deference to her dead father's wish, partly in consequence of some vow made in her distress to the Lady of the Garde Douloureuse—accepted his hand.

He had vowed on taking the Cross to serve for three years, and he could in no-wise free himself, though he strove for a dispensation. They were betrothed. He made every arrangement possible for her comfort. She remained in her own Castle, with a competent force and an approved castellan; but to me was consigned the charge of the external defences, and my uncle entrusted to me the care of her safety.'

'We never met—I could not trust myself. Happily I was ignorant of the state of Eveline's feelings. Troubles arose upon the Marches, and when the three years were well-nigh ended, an attack of the Welsh, led by a false kinsman, made the Lady Eveline a prisoner. It was only for a few hours that this imprisonment lasted, but in endeavouring to rescue her I was desperately wounded. They carried me, scarcely sensible, to the Garde Douloureuse.

'Appearances were against us in every

way. I was imprisoned, and the Lady Eveline placed in a convent. My uncle returned to find his betrothed a prisoner in all but name; his nephew confined in a foul dungeon, and both accused of treachery against not only himself, but their sovereign. He was not, however, one to listen to the babble of evil tongues, and there were, happily, witnesses enough who knew the truth, and who testified to the facts. Nobly and generously did my uncle behave. He gave me an opportunity of vindicating myself in a way that left no doubt of my truth; he then resigned Eveline to me, and himself accepted the command in Ireland.'

Sir Damian paused with an emotion he could not suppress. He passed his hand before his eyes, and continued:

'Can you wonder then, that after the happy wedded life I have led with my Eveline, I feel almost as if I had done him a grievous wrong when I see what his life must have been with that woman, who

neither appreciated his great soul, nor will obey his known wishes?'

'What a beautiful tale it is!' said the Lady de Courcy.

'Ah,' said her husband, 'we shall have you telling it when you are asked for some tale of true love.'

'No, no,' she answered. 'It is too sacred and too sweet to tell—till age and death have consecrated it. It may perhaps be told to our children's children—or to those that come after.'

'Yes, you need not fear our betraying your confidence, Sir Damian. We can sympathize with your feeling towards your uncle's memory. But the good God alone knows the discipline that each of us needs. You had three years of deep and bitter trial, and your truth had its reward. It may be there was something to be purged from your uncle's noble nature which nought but fretting trouble could cure. I sometimes dread what may be in store for me, when I consider the blessings I have had

and the uniformly prosperous tenour of my life. Though as long as that evil-minded Prince John does not sit upon the throne of England, I have no fear for my position here; and of that, happily, there is no chance.'

'I trust not,' said Sir Damian; 'but since the reign of the Confessor till that of our present sovereign, there has not been one occupant of the throne whose title has been unquestioned.'

Sir Damian de Lacy was to sail for England the next day. He had won golden opinions from the inhabitants of Doune. It was good to see one the course of whose life had flown so serenely, yet who was in no way spoiled by prosperity; whose chivalry was as graceful, whose knighthood was as real as the youthful aspirant fresh from the bath, and the watch, and the accolade. And though Elfrica could think no one equal to her own stalwart knight, with his strong, protecting arm, yet the very tenderness that he ever

showed her and their child, was made the more precious by the contrast it afforded to his usual abrupt and downright ways. Sir Damian's chivalry was of a more dainty order. He was as true, as honest, as upright as her husband, but his gentle courtesy was shown to all alike; indeed, it appeared as much part of his nature as the refined and exquisite outline of his face, or the grace of his slender figure; and, dearly loving romances as she did, Elfrica longed to see the heroine of the tale which had so captivated her fancy.

So, when Sir Damian pressed upon them to visit him and his wife at the Garde Douloureuse, she said, with an arch look at her husband:

'Sir John has promised me, *some day*, that I shall visit his own dear land of Somerset, the land of orchards and of golden fruit, to see his own Castle of Stoke Courcy, and to worship in the glorious old fane at Glastonbury.'

'Not *my* Glastonbury,' said her hus-

band; 'that exists no more. With Abbot Henry gone, and the Abbey held by the King, the old buildings all burnt in that terrible fire—not even the Vetusta Ecclesia, the most ancient Christian relic in all Britain, left—I scarce think that I could bear to see the Glassy Isle again.'*

'Ah! but,' said Elfrica, 'you *must* redeem your pledge, and take me to see your own home.'

'You see, Sir Damian, that this little one will give me no peace till I fulfil my word. When these Irish troubles are settled, I trust to take my wife to see my mother ere she dies; and then we will, God willing, accept your hospitality on our way back. I am anxious, too, to see

* The buildings, or at least the greater part of them, so lately raised by Henry of Blois were burnt in a fire which took place while the King sequestrated the revenues of the abbey. He vowed, therefore, on behalf of himself and his heirs, to rebuild the abbey; but little had been done before his death, and it was not till the reign of Henry III. that the great church was raised again.

where we can best place our boy. I would have him, for a time at least, at a monastery school, where he may meet with other lads of his own age and breeding, so that he may not forget that he is a Norman gentleman. Aye, Elfrica, had you been with us, you would have seen how the sons of a true-hearted English knight may degenerate to low and savage ruffianism.'

Elfrica did not need to be told that her husband referred to Walter and Hugh de Lacy. At present they were anxious to keep on good terms with Sir John de Courcy, for they cared not to imperil their inheritance, and they knew that on his report it depended whether they should be confirmed in it, or that it should be declared forfeit to the Crown, as their father died in opposition to the King's authority.

'Yet,' said De Courcy, 'they are as little to be trusted as tiger-cubs.'

'But your son is more happy than those lads. He *has* a father, and his mother is *not* a Lady Una.'

Sir Damian departed, with many hopes of a speedy meeting; but the time passed on, and still Elfrica's promised visit was delayed. Time had exercised its healing influence on Sir Almeric de Tristram's grief; and his polished manners and unfailing courtesy seemed to have a wholesome effect on the brothers De Lacy, so that they appeared at least loyal and submissive. But though Sir Almeric's home was Howth, he was scarcely more there than at Doune, where his coming was always a fresh pleasure and a great relief to his friend; nor was he less valued by Elfrica. John de Tristram had succeeded his brother as his father's squire; and so three years passed away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VISIT TO ENGLAND.

It was in the month of July, in the year of grace 1189, that news came to Doune that Henry the King was dead. He, once the greatest monarch in Europe, died of fever and a broken heart, caused by the disobedience and rebellion of his sons, who were in a great measure driven into opposition to their father by his own capricious and unjust treatment. Forced into signing a humiliating treaty, the discovery that his spoilt darling, John, was amongst the rebels, broke his heart, and he passed away cursing his own children, and blaspheming his Maker.

The news was brought by Nicholas de

Tristram, who came, eager to win permission from his father to join the Crusade on which King Richard was going to start immediately after his coronation. Sir Henry de Louvelle had taken the Cross, and Nicholas would attend him as his squire; and he hoped in Syria to win his spurs, and earn the knighthood which he looked forward to receive from the sword of the King himself. He brought also a summons to his uncle De Courcy to be present at Richard's coronation, in order to do homage for his estates and baronies in England, Ireland, and Normandy.

The time seemed propitious. De Tristram was at Doune when his son arrived, and when he saw the eagerness in Elfrica's face, he said:

'Brother, take your wife with you. Let Nicholas represent me and do homage in my stead, and I will stay here and look after affairs in your absence. Trust me, and give yourselves a holiday together.'

It was all settled without delay. Miles

was to go, as well as Arthur and John de Tristram, that they might see their grandam once more; and Sir Almeric declared that he should be more at ease in attending to his various duties if he were relieved of all anxiety with regard to his sons. To Nicholas he gave earnest and tender advice, entreating him to bear himself as a good soldier of the Cross. He warned him of the manifold temptations that would beset him, and entreated him never to stain his escutcheon with deeds unfitting a Christian knight. Miles was to be placed in some monastic school, so that, as in most important events in life, there was a mingling of light and shade, a chequered prospect of grief and joy.

The next few days were full of preparation. Edgitha and Norna were busy with their lady's wardrobe, for though Sir John thought it unlikely that ladies would be admitted to the coronation, as the King was yet a bachelor, still, as Princess of Mona and Countess of Ulster, etc., she

must be prepared to take her part in any festivities that might chance.

The day of departure came. Sir Almeric and Sir Bertram and the whole of the household attended them to the vessel to bid them God-speed. Nicholas and his brothers knelt for their father's blessing, and the parting between Sir Almeric de Tristram and Sir John de Courcy was scarcely less tender; yet neither dreamed that never in this life should they look upon each other's face again.

The good ship *Mona* sailed proudly from the port on that bright summer's day. How lovely was Strangford Lough with its islands and its mountain barriers; how exquisitely blue the waters of the sea; how brightly shone the not-far-distant shores of Man. There was no mist then to hide it from their eyes.

But though Elfrica looked lovingly at her island home, yet with an intelligent curiosity and still greater eagerness did she scan the shores of Ireland on the one

side, and the still more unknown coasts of Wales on the other; and as they sailed just within view of the Welsh coast, point after point and peak after peak came within their ken, and eagerly did she ask her husband the name of each. But when the vessel rounded the shores of Pembroke, De Courcy desired the vessel to be steered between Lundy Island and Ilfracombe; and now it was no longer the Irish Sea or the waves of the blue Atlantic, but a slower, heavier sea; and the further they steered eastwards the more sensible they became of the discolouration of the water, though it had not yet attained to the state of liquid mud which that much ill-used piece of water, the Bristol Channel, has now arrived at. They skirted the Devonshire coast, and,

'There,' said De Courcy, 'is Exmoor. And now we are at home, are we not, Edgitha?'

Edgitha, with moist eyes, was straining them to see could she catch a sight of

Dunkery Beacon. But Sir John laughed at her, and told her to be content if in Porlock Bay they might glimpse, by the beautiful hanging woods that came down to the water's edge, Bossington Beacon; and now could they really make out the towers of Dunster Castle? Edgitha said she could. But the coast became flatter and less picturesque, though St. Decuman's Church at Watchet looked down then, as now, from a commanding height on the low shores.

They were entering Bridgewater Bay, or perhaps then called the Bay of Burgh-Walter, and the low flat meadow-land, with its marshy shores, was different indeed from what they had been seeing; and the scenery was tame and flat.

At the mouth of the Parret a pilot-boat came out to warn them not to ascend the river till the 'bore' or 'eager,' which ever comes with the spring tides, should pass. They waited, as desired; and after a little delay it came—a crested wave, nine feet

in height, rushing up the river and carrying all before it. After it had passed, out swarmed a fleet of flat-bottomed boats to tow the large vessel into port. On board there was much bustle and preparation, but Sir John and Lady de Courcy stood with their eyes fixed on the shore.

'And this is your home, John,' said Elfrica, trying to find something to admire, and not to look disappointed.

He put his arm round her.

'This is not equal to Strangford Lough and Doune. Ah, little one!'

'Not quite,' she said; 'but how rich and fruitful these meadow-lands are with the golden stars glittering in the green sward! how contentedly the large oxen and peaceful kine are grazing in the rich pastures!'

'Yes; the land is peaceful, prosperous, and contented. But look there, Elfrica! see—can you make out the mount there, with a tower on its summit?'

'Yes—I think so. Oh, John! is that Glastonbury Tor?'

'Yes, dearest; and at the foot of the mount, amongst the orchards that flourish there, stands the first of the holy houses ever built to the glory of God in these islands. There it stands, and shall stand till time is past.'

'My Lord, how can you be so certain? please God it may.'

'Ah, Edgitha! hast never heard the prophecy that Glastonbury shall last till a whiting swim on the top of St. Michael's Tor?

'And that can never be,' said Edgitha thoughtfully.

'I know not,' said Elfrica gravely. 'I always misdoubt those juggling prophecies; they have a way of coming true in a manner we least expect.'

By this time it began to be known on the North Somerset coast that their great countryman, Sir John de Courcy, was on board the vessel slowly making its way up the Parret. There was a hurrying to and fro on the shore, and presently a knight,

with a train of attendants, rode rapidly down to the landing-place, and with eager demonstrations of welcome greeted the voyagers.

'Ha, Will!' and——

'Is it really you, John? or should I not rather say, the most puissant Baron de Courcy, Earl of Ulster and Lord Deputy of Ireland?'

'As you please, Will; but then I must needs introduce the Princess of Mona and Countess of Ulster to the Baron de Briwere and Lord of Burgh-Walter, and not my wife to my dear old friend Will Briwere.'

Their hands were clasped long ere this, and Elfrica received the courtesies of her husband's earliest friend with her accustomed grace.

De Courcy would only take a hurried meal, and press on to Stoke, though De Briwere would have had them rest awhile; he was pacified, however, by their promise to come and see him in his quaint but best-loved home on the little river Ile.

'When next you visit England, John, I trust to have a stone bridge here, such as they talk of building now over the Thames to unite the South-wark to the north shores of London.'

'And mayhap a fine castle for Sir William de Briwere,' laughed De Courcy. 'But meanwhile, we will be content to visit him at his manor-house at Ile de Briwere.'

'Or "Ile Brewers," as the good folk of Somerset call it,' said Sir William. 'It is dear to me,' he added, 'as the first bit of land I could call mine own—the first grant that my late good Lord, King Henry (may God assoyl him!), made me; and I have now good possessions, John. One *must* have a castle, I suppose, especially at such a port as this is becoming; but I love better my rambling old house, and when I need rest and ease I get me there.'

'And what do all these men here?' said De Courcy.

'They are draining and clearing the land near the haven. We would fain look our best; for it is said the King——'

'What! Prince Richard?' said De Courcy.

'Aye—but King we must learn to call him. He intends making a western progress whilst the preparations for his coronation are being forwarded.'

'Is it so, indeed? Then I shall hope to persuade my dear lord and master to visit me at Stoke; and you shall come, Will, and teach us how to play the courtier.'

'*I* teach the Earl of Ulster! Why, did you not play the courtier to Prince John?'

'Prince John! Bah! to but say his name gives one's mouth an ill taste for hours to come! No, thank heaven! I trust he shall never be lord of mine!'

'And is this little lad your namesake?' said De Briwere, gliding, as he had the knack of doing, from a disagreeable sub-

ject, yet without the appearance of suddenly changing the conversation.

'No,' answered De Courcy, laying his hand on his young son's head; 'one John was enough, and we have called him Miles.'

'Is he to be trained at Glastonbury?'

'I scarcely know; we seek for information on this, as on other points.'

'It is said that Prince Henry of Soliaco, the King's nephew, is to be the next Abbot; the office was promised to him by the late King. But you would scarce know the place, John; yet the buildings are rising in great beauty, and St. Mary's Chapel—or, as they will call it, St. Joseph's—is a splendid piece of work. At present it is used for service; but when the whole is finished it will but serve as a vestibule or galilee to the great church.'*

So they talked on, as Sir William Briwere rode on one side of De Courcy. At last De Briwere, with his courtly breeding, said:

* As now at Durham.

'I fear me, De Courcy, we talk of what interests not your fair lady.'

'Not interest me, Sir Knight! I love Glastonbury as well, or better, than St. Patrick's Cathedral. Do you think I could be these years De Courcy's wife, and not have learned to love his second home, the fair monastery at Avalon?'

'She knows every tale and legend that Father Geraint told us when we were boys as well as I do,' said her husband.

'Yes,' she said; 'I have heard of St. Joseph of Arimathea and the Sacred Thorn and Holy Grail; of Arviragus and the Twelve Hides of Glastonbury; of St. Lucius, and St. Patrick, and King Arthur; of St. Neot and King Alfred, the two pious brothers; of St. Dunstan and Edmund the Pious, and the hunt at Cheddar; and you can believe how I have longed to see the very spots hallowed by these holy men, and dear to me still more for my husband's sake.'

They were riding now over the Bridge-

water flats. The rhines, full of water, shone in the light of the setting sun; and De Briwere begged them to push on, and get free from the water-meadows, which, though passable in summer-time, were dangerous in the uncertain twilight. The sun was sinking fast in the west, flooding the landscape with every shade of saffron and pink, of rose-colour and green, and the peculiar shade of tender grey dashed with red, which gave an air of rest and repose to the gorgeous colouring reflected in the meres and water-courses. The Quantock Hills now rose dark and purple before them, while the sun sinking behind them touched their heights with a golden crown of glory light, and the landscape sank into deep shade.

Elfrica drew a long breath.

'Oh, John! how lovely it is!'

'Yes; each country has beauties of its own, but it is the same sun that shines upon and lights up all alike.'

But now the moon rose and shed its

pure white light on a dark mass that loomed in the distance : it was the quaint old Saxon church, since replaced by one of early English date. Dark and sombre it looked till the moon shone full upon it, and traced its outline in silver sheen.

'There, Elfrica, is St. Andrew of Stoke, which, please God, shall live again in Doune. But see there!' and the De Courcies' Castle stood out full in the stream of moonlight.

Elfrica held out her hand to her husband, who clasped it in his; and at that moment neither Mona, nor Doune, nor even Glastonbury, were to her what her husband's birthplace and her husband's Castle were. She only feared, she said, whether Lady de Courcy would be inconvenienced by the sudden arrival of so large a party.

But for once De Courcy was not listening. Memories of long ago came rushing over him: the scarce-remembered time when, on his father's war-horse, he had

ridden over the drawbridge; then of his boyish days, when he and De Briwere spent their holidays at Stoke with his mother and sisters and his baby-brother. Then came the time when he brought back a still dearer friend, because more like-minded; and Sir Almeric de Tristram won the love of his sister; and now he was bringing with him for the first time his own dear lady and wife to his own and his father's home. And so the train of ideas which had rushed so rapidly through his mind brought him back again to the present time, and Elfrica's words came to his understanding; for, indeed, the whole train of recollection had swept before his mind's vision in a moment of time, and he said:

'Elfrica, think you that Miles's coming home could ever inconvenience *you?* It is our mother we are going to visit.'

'Ah!' she said; 'I never knew a mother's love.'

'De Courcy sounded his bugle; but as

they came to the moat that surrounded the Castle, they found the drawbridge already lowered, the Castle-gates open; and at the moment that Sir John de Courcy and his wife, Edgitha and the boys, followed by the rest of the train, crossed the bridge, the massive doors of the Castle were thrown open, a flood of light was poured upon the scene by the torches held in the hands of the retainers. Shouts and joyful sounds of welcome greeted the lord and lady of the Castle as they passed the outer and inner courts; and the church bells, in spite of the lateness of the hour, lent their music to swell the joyous clamour.

And now they reached the door of their own Castle, and there stood, in long dark silken robes to her feet, with wimple and gorget, which she had never cast aside, the elder Lady de Courcy. In an instant De Courcy had flung himself from his horse, and entreated his mother's blessing. She gave it, as he bent his knee before

her. Then he lifted Elfrica from her saddle, and leading her forward, said :

'Mother, I have brought you another daughter ;' and Elfrica was clasped in a mother's arms.

Meanwhile Miles, in close imitation of his father, knelt before his grandmother, and the three De Tristrams received a fond welcome ; and the whole happy party entered the Castle together.

De Briwere was warmly welcomed, and thanked for having sent warning of her son's arrival, and was pressed to stay the night, as the return would have been difficult and dangerous at that late hour.

There was much to ask and much to tell. Perhaps the shadow of the loss of the Lady de Tristram made the joy of their welcome more subdued. Lady de Courcy was delighted at the arrangement that Nicholas should represent his father at the approaching coronation. She heedfully watched the training of the boys. Little Miles with his ready obedience and

winning courtesy soon won her heart, while the young De Tristrams showed by their modesty and graceful ease of manner that they had not, as she feared, lost in the bogs and fens of Ireland the courtly manners of Norman gentlemen.

'But,' said Lady de Courcy, 'I wonder that Sir Almeric should have been willing to part with all his boys.'

'It is,' said Elfrica, 'but his ever-loving spirit of self-sacrifice. Sir Hugh de Lacy gone and John in England, he will have much ado to supply their place.'

'Yes,' said De Courcy, 'he has undertaken double and treble work; but he will do it all the more happily that his mind is at ease about the lads.'

De Briwere's news of the King's western tour was discussed, and De Courcy asked his mother, was she willing to undergo the fatigue of receiving him at Stoke?

'Indeed I will,' she said. 'But,' smiling at Elfrica, 'it is not I that shall receive him, but you, my son and daughter.'

'Nay, mother; you are the lady of the Castle, and we but your guests, though Elfrica will gladly share your labours.'

The next few days were spent happily by De Courcy in introducing Elfrica to his old haunts; nor would their mother allow her to assist in the household duties, bidding her enjoy her holiday with her husband while she could. But now the ever-busy and ubiquitous De Briwere brought word that the King was expected to land at Southampton, and that the knights and nobles of the south and west were turning out in all their bravery to receive him. Personally Richard was but little known in England; he had lived almost entirely in France, acting as his mother's representative in Aquitaine. So that though English by birth, having been born at Oxford, he was more a stranger than his father had been when he became King; for Henry II. had been brought up and educated in a great measure by his maternal uncle, Robert, Earl of Gloucester,

whilst the present sovereign knew almost nothing of the manners, habits, customs, or language of the nation he was called to rule. But the renown of his achievements in both war and minstrelsy had made him very popular, and the people were prepared to receive him with loyal enthusiasm.

De Courcy set off with a gallant train, accompanied by his young nephew, who, as his father's representative, had a following of his own personal attendants. And as they rode on their company was swelled by knights and barons and their retinues on the same errand, to whom, if strangers, they were made known by De Briwere, who knew everyone. In passing through the New Forest, De Briwere pointed out a small cross, which marked the spot as nearly as he could ascertain where he had been discovered and rescued by the late King, and 'whence your father, De Courcy, guarded me, a wailing babe, to Glastonbury;' for Sir William Briwere disarmed

all envious sneers at his doubtful origin by never affecting to forget it himself.

They arrived at Southampton in time to see the vessel bearing the royal standard of England sail into port, and half the chivalry of the country were there to welcome their sovereign as he landed on his native soil. Even in such a gathering as this he stood a king among men. His fine figure, his martial port, his bright blue eyes and golden hair formed a picture that man or woman might have loved to look upon. And in all the crowd of attendant knights and barons De Courcy alone could compare with the King in stature and strength and prowess in war, while in policy he went far beyond him. Richard soon singled him out as an old friend and companion-in-arms; then, turning to De Briwere who stood near him, he said:

'Surely, sir, your face is familiar to me; but your name has escaped me.'

De Briwere, pointing to the sprig of

heather which he ever wore in cap or helmet, answered :

'I am, sir, but what your father's bounty made me. I am William Briwere.'

'An early and dear friend of mine, may it please your Grace,' said De Courcy.

'A favoured servant of my father and a friend of yours, De Courcy, must needs be a friend of mine. But how comes it that neither of you have taken the Cross ?'

'I could scarce leave my present charge save at my King's command,' answered De Courcy. 'But here let me present to you my nephew, Nicholas de Tristram, son of my dear friend and brother, Sir Almeric de Tristram.'

'Ah ! he who was ever your *alter ego*—your brother-in-arms ; ye were ever inseparable. Where is he ?'

'He remains in Ireland taking my place there. His son will, if it please you, represent his father at your Grace's coronation, and then accompany you to the Holy Land. He has already assumed the Cross.'

'Aye, it pleases me well; and we look to you to preserve that fair isle of the sea to our throne in peace,' said the King. 'But, De Briwere, what keeps you from the Holy Wars?'

'My Lord, I am not like Sir John de Courcy — a great captain and valiant soldier. By your royal father I was ever more trained in policy than war; but, as one who owes everything to the bounty of the Crown, I am ready to do as you, sir, shall command: either to follow you to the Holy Land, or to give such poor help as I can in maintaining peace at home.'

'It is well,' said Richard. 'We shall need loyal servants at home, as well as good soldiers abroad.'

As they wended their way towards Winchester, the King called De Courcy to his side; and as they rode together it were difficult to say which was the more magnificent figure, as they towered above the other knights in height, as well as surpassed them by the splendour of their

accoutrements. The King questioned De Courcy about the state of Ireland. He now learned for the first time the true tale of the recall of Prince John, and he promised De Courcy that he should never be allowed to return and claim his lordship.

Scant recognition had passed between De Courcy and the Prince ; and when the latter saw his brother engrossed with De Courcy, he fell behind, and calling Sir William Briwere to his side, congratulated him on not having been led away by the folly, as he termed it, of the Crusading spirit. John had ever the art of making himself agreeable, nor had De Briwere ever sustained the provocation from the Prince that De Courcy had. Besides that, he was naturally of a more placable nature, and more able to adapt himself to any company in which he found himself.

'And where has De Courcy left his wife ?' said the Prince.

'The Lady de Courcy,' answered Sir

William, 'is at Stoke in Somerset, with his mother. She is, I think, the loveliest creature that ever my eyes did look upon.'

'But as proud as Lucifer,' said Prince John.

To this Sir William made no response, well assured that the Prince had met with some check to his attempts at gallantry, or he would not have spoken slightingly of so fair a being.

And so they rode on, a gallant cavalcade, to England's ancient capital, where they saw, fresh from the hands of the builder, the magnificent cathedral of Winchester, and the noble hospital of St. Cross, founded by the munificence of Bishop Henry of Blois; which latter remains almost intact as it stood in those days, and, marvellous to say, its revenues not diverted from their original purpose. It is a precious relic of mediæval splendour of design and large-hearted benevolence to the poor, instituted before and untrammelled by poor-law economics.

CHAPTER V.

THE WESTERN PROGRESS AND THE CORONATION.

As soon as the King declared publicly his intention of making a western progress before his coronation, pages, squires, and men-at-arms were seen scouring the country, bearing orders for the necessary preparations at the various abbeys and castles at which he intended to halt. Meanwhile De Courcy returned home, undertaking to meet the King at Glastonbury, and from thence conduct him to Stoke. He found his mother charmed with Elfrica, and only inclined to chide him that she had not made her acquaintance long before; and she added with a loving pride, that it was

only from his wife that she had learned to realize the greatness of her son. De Courcy gladly listened to the praises that were so dear to him; and on the other hand, when alone with his wife, she was as eloquent on the virtues of his mother.

The King spent some days at Winchester, securing the almost fabulous hoards of the late King, and gathering information with regard to the state of the country, and the best means of providing for its peace and tranquillity during his absence. Here he found Sir William Briwere, with his clear logical head, his marvellous powers of adaptation, his common-sense and shrewdness, invaluable; he was able to lay matters before the King with the utmost clearness, and gradually Richard, like his father, learned to depend upon him.

Affairs of State having been put in train, the King started on his tour. His first halt was at the Abbey of Reading, founded by his great-grandfather, Henry I., and

which contained his tomb. Here, as at all the abbeys Richard visited, he made large offerings, endeavouring thus to propitiate Heaven to bless his arms in the East. From Reading he proceeded to Malmesbury, second only to Glastonbury in wealth and importance, thence to Bath, Bristol, and Wells, and from thence to Glastonbury, where De Courcy met him.

To De Courcy there was more of pain than pleasure in revisiting his old haunts. That spot so sacred, not only to him but to all the world, was sadly and strangely changed since last he worshipped within its walls. Not only was the venerable Abbot, Bishop Henry of Blois, replaced by this young princeling Abbot, Henry of Soliaco, but the buildings, raised by the piety of the late Abbot, had been destroyed by fire, and as yet only St. Joseph's Chapel was restored; nor was it till the reign of Henry III., when, to use a modern phrase, the great revival of church architecture took place, that the great church was

rebuilt, of which now only its slight and exquisite ruins remain. Strangely enough, the ruins of the so-called St. Joseph's Chapel, though nearly a hundred years older than the rest, yet are in a much more perfect state, showing possibly the greater stability of the Norman work to the more graceful but less massive Early English.

But changed as the state of the buildings was, there was still greater change in the tone and discipline of the monastery; for the long period in which the late King had appropriated the revenues, and refused the monks permission to choose an abbot, had told sadly upon its moral and religious character. It was natural that, with his love of chivalry and romance, after the King had made his offerings at St. Joseph's shrine, he should make inquiries as to how far his father's instructions had been carried out, and search made for King Arthur's grave. The Abbot replied truly that he had been scarcely at Glastonbury long enough to look into such matters, but that

he hoped to have it inquired into as soon as possible; but he presented to the King a sword which he affirmed to be Arthur's, and which he said had been rescued from the great fire.

De Courcy felt rather astonished; perhaps the Abbot saw the doubt upon his face, for he hastened to explain that it had lain concealed behind a chest, as in former days the sapphire altar had been found hidden behind a door. Nobody was sceptical enough to ask how the Abbot had discovered that the sword was Arthur's. It is possible the King himself was doubtful as to the genuineness of the relic, as he generously made a present of it soon afterwards to Tancred, King of Sicily.* To De Courcy, with his deep romantic faith, invented legends and manufactured relics were a profanation, and firmly believing, as he did, in the tale of Arthur's sword Excalibur, which had been flung into the mere and drawn below the water by the

* Miss Strickland's 'Life of Berengaria.'

hand of the Lady of the Lake, this story of the Abbot's was to him a cheat and a desecration. De Courcy left Glastonbury with a feeling of disgust and distrust, and had it not been for his promise to Elfrica, would have sworn never to enter the sacred precincts again; but as he turned away, he knew that never again, except in memory, could it be to him what it had been in days of yore.

From Glastonbury they proceeded to Stoke, where Richard's chivalrous courtesy won the hearts of both the Ladies de Courcy; and the King himself was equally attracted by the stately energy of the elder and the retiring loveliness of the younger Lady de Courcy, while he was able to sympathize heartily with the respectful tenderness of Sir John de Courcy for his mother, for Richard had ever been a dutiful son to at least one of his parents. The group of grandsons also formed a picturesque foreground to the fine picture

of mediæval life afforded in this grim old Castle.

The next day King Richard set out for Sir William de Mohun's Castle of Dunster, which, in point of position and stately grandeur, is the finest in the West of England. On his way he paid his devotions at the Abbey of Cleve, then in its fresh beauty and scarce out of the builder's hands. The founder, William de Romare, son of the Earl of Lincoln, guided the party through the Vallis Florida to the Abbey, whose remains are still full of beauty and interest.

This spot and Combe Florey, near Taunton, suggesting by their very names the wealth of wild flowers for which the county is famous, are typical but by no means exceptional specimens of the lavish beauty with which nature has decked the Summer-land in each sequestered vale or deep country lane, the favourite haunts of Flora's train.

Summer was passing into autumn when

Richard and his train passed through those scenes whose beauty only varies with each changing season : for winter has not passed into spring when the primrose looks up to heaven, and the lovely white bells of the snowdrop lovingly bend to earth ; while the sweet-scented violet modestly hides among its leaves, but reveals itself to the careful searcher, and the yellow daffodil with its rich golden bells waves in the March winds.

Then the blue-bells and the white-thorn mark the transition from spring to summer ; and now what pen can describe the rich luxuriance of the wilderness of flowers which crowd each other in wild profusion on the natural hanging-gardens which border the deep lanes ? Wild roses with their fragile blossoms and delicate scent hang in fantastic wreaths, and the honeysuckle festoons itself from branch to branch ; while the foxglove stands upright with its rich purple bells, and the blue-eyed veronica and wood-anemone wave their slender blossoms in the breeze, and the sapphire-

hued harebell rings its tiny bells though none but fairy ears can hear the chime, and round the pools the blue forget-me-not, the mallow and the ox-eyed daisy cluster with their varied tints.

With autumn comes the rich colouring of the trees, and the scarlet poppy wanders beyond the corn-fields to the hedgerows, where its brilliant hue lights up with its warm beauty the fading year; through the gaps in the hedge the corn-cockle may be seen, with its rich blue tint contrasting with the golden brown of the bending grain.

The orchards, too, vary their dress with the changing season; the delicate pink and white of the apple blossom flush the landscape in the opening year, while their summer robe of green is enlivened by the ripening fruit, and in autumn the branches bend beneath the load of russet, crimson and golden fruit; nor in winter are they left brown and bare, for the apple-tree and the aspen are the favourite home of the mistle-

toe, which enlivens the dead time of the year with its yellow-green leaves and transparent berries. And the branches of the magnificent elm-trees spread their protecting arms over the beauty we have attempted to describe. But the time would fail to tell of the rare orchids and the cowslips, of the ferns and the mosses and the hundreds of fair flowers that we ruthlessly crush beneath our feet, and yet whose wild and untrained beauty so far excels the costly rarities of the green-house.

It is probable that all this rich luxuriance of form and colour was little noted by Richard or his followers; the mind and the eye both required to be educated to discern the delicate loveliness that surrounds us on every side. Chaucer had not then lived and written to make us understand and sympathize with all that 'earth, air, ocean, and the starry sky' have to give us of instruction and beauty. So, unconscious, we may suppose, for the

most part, of the beauties that were on every side, the gallant train swept on; and now the scenery, without losing its richness, becomes more picturesque. The towers of Dunster Castle look down with a protecting air upon the quaint little town that nestles at the foot of the hill on which they stand. De Mohun explained to the King that it had belonged to his family since the Conquest, and had been held in the last reign for the Empress against the usurper Stephen.

After partaking of the grand hospitality of the Lord of Dunster, the next day was devoted to a hunt on Exmoor, then filled with all kinds of game, and where alone to this day in all England is the red deer hunted in its native home. Prickers were sent on to rouse the game, and 'all the hunt rode on.'

They passed on their way the exquisite little village of Porlock, or the 'enclosed port,' with its hanging woods and its rare ferns. Here Sir Simon Fitz-Roger came

out to meet his sovereign. After welcoming Richard at Southampton, he had hastened back to Porlock to spend the last few days, before he joined the King in the Crusade, with his family, and to arrange matters during his absence. Sir Simon's tomb may still be seen in the quaint little Church of St. Dubritius, with its churchyard cross and ancient yew-tree relics of bygone days. He persuaded the whole troop to partake here of a hunter's meal; then, being joined by foresters and dogs, they rode up the steep sides of Dunkery Beacon. It was clothed, as the western tourist may see it to this day at the same time of the year, in a gorgeous robe of purple and gold, the colours of the heath and the gorse making fantastic patterns as the sunlight flashed upon them. They reached the summit, and the rounded knolls covered with purple heather appeared as a sea whose billows had been flooded with a glorious purple light, as the undulating mass glowed in the rising

sun. Below them lay the sea, its tints varying with those of the early morning, and at their left hand was the dense forest of Exmoor, whilst on the other sides spread out a far-reaching and magnificently widespread view.

Sir William Mohun here pointed out to Richard the chief objects of interest. The panorama seen from the highest point of the Beacon includes within its horizon an extent of five hundred miles. Dartmoor, the Quantock and the Mendip Hills, with the long mountain-ranges of Wales, may be discerned; and sixteen counties, it is affirmed, are to be wholly or in part traced out. Here Richard, as he looked, saw at one glance more of his kingdom than he had ever seen before. Then down the steep sides they dashed in pursuit of game. Ten noble stags were laid low; but when the hunt was over, the King found that he had crossed the border which separated the Summer-land from the fair county of Devon.

The praises of Devonshire have been too often sung by writers of legend and romance, as well as by sober-minded tourists, for them to need description here. The King was hospitably entreated at his various resting-places, but he pressed on, as he would fain see Dundagel (Tintagel), the British hero's birth-place, and also the spot where Excalibur was flung away.

And now they had to cross a bare heath with no landmarks to guide them, and nought but the sky above and the moorland below; the country so destitute of special features that they had to seek the services of a native guide. Once more they made for the coast; but so changed was the aspect, that it was difficult to believe that only a few miles separated it from the exquisite loveliness of the scenes they had just visited. The savage wildness of the cliffs seemed erected as an invincible barrier against the fury of the waves, which ever seek to encroach;

but as they dash against the iron-bound coast, they are flung back by the simple force of passive resistance.

It was with a diminished train that the King approached Dundagel, many of the knights and nobles having excused themselves from going farther than Launceston; but as the party crossed the moor, their gay accoutrements, their banners and pennons, their brilliant tabards and scarves, and their flashing armour, stood out in grand relief against the blue sky overhead and the grey moorland beneath. The hard, dark outline of the grim old Castle could now be seen traced out against the sky. It must have been a fortress of great strength, and practically impregnable before the discovery of gunpowder. On the mainland was the larger part of the Castle, of no great height; and then, separated from it, on an island-rock jutting into the sea, a dizzy abyss between, stood the Castle-keep, only connected with the mainland by a drawbridge, while

below the waves of the Atlantic, beat against the cliffs on which it stood, and uttered a hoarse roar, as they dashed and foamed like a wild beast disappointed of its prey.

Now they drew nearer, and signs of a great commotion were apparent. There was a hurrying to and fro, then a passing of what was evidently the garrison over the drawbridge, the drawbridge itself was withdrawn, and all was silent.

The King's brow grew dark.

'I knew not,' he said, 'that I had rebels here in my realm of England.'

'Let me ride forward, my liege,' said the Castellan of Launceston, 'and I will soon discover the meaning of this strange discourtesy.'

The party halted, whilst the Knight, unattended, rode forward. He wound his horn, and at once on the island-rock appeared a Knight clad in complete armour; he demanded who the party were, and what was their will?

'Entrance and hospitality for King Richard,' was the answer.

'King Richard!' said the Knight. 'I know of no King but King Henry.'

'How! know you not that King Henry is dead, and that Earl Richard is now our liege lord and sovereign?'

'Then,' said Sir Robert of Dundagel, 'if indeed this is so, and you will grant me a safe-conduct, I will cross to the mainland and converse with the King; but no notice had been sent me of King Harry's death, nor of his Grace's visit here, and I must run no risk of surrendering my trust.'

A plank was now laid across, and alone, but fully armed, Sir Robert crossed the chasm. After a few words with the King, his scruples were satisfied, and he admitted Richard into his Castle. Sir Robert bewailed his having had no warning of the King's visit; but ordering the drawbridge to be lowered, he bade his attendants hasten to make such provision

as they could for King Richard and his men.

Meanwhile, Sir Robert showed the King all that was rare and curious in the double Castle. He took him across the drawbridge; he pointed out to him the spot on the island-rock where Arthur, 'a naked, wailing, new-born babe,' was found by Merlin, and declared to be Uther's son. Then, as the Cornish chough, with its coral beak and legs, wheeled overhead, Sir Robert told the King it held Arthur's spirit, which still hovers over his ancient home.

The scene had a strange charm for the King. Still he lingered on the island-rock, and standing on the western extremity, looked out over what seemed the illimitable waste of wild waters. And as he looked across the great ocean, he appeared to be gazing into infinity of space and time; yet how little could he guess of the wonderful message which those restless waves would one

day bear to its shores! how, instead of being part of the great stream Oceanus, which in the fables of the ancients bounded the shores of Earth, it would prove but a great highway to yet undiscovered worlds! For a moment, perhaps, some thought of the great future crossed his mental vision, as he said:

'Atlantis! Is that but a fable of ancient days, or shall some day a new world be discovered beyond the limits of the ocean? Ha, Sir John!' he added, turning to De Courcy, 'you are of those who have enlarged our western boundaries; what say you, as law, and civilization, and our holy religion seem ever moving westwards, shall we, beyond that unknown water, find a fresh world to conquer and new lands to discover?'

'It is a grand dream, my liege,' said De Courcy.

'And is not this a place for dreams?' said Richard. 'Yet now we are bound for the East; but well-nigh since time

began, empire has ever rolled westwards —from Assyria to Persia, from Persia to Greece, from Greece to Rome.'

'Yet now the waves seem ebbing back, said De Courcy.

'It may be so,' said Richard; 'who can tell?'

Returning from these as yet far-distant and apparently visionary ideas, the Castellan bade the King remark how the cliff was worn away by the action of wind and wave, so that gradually at the top the distance between the island and the mainland was ever increasing, while the *débris* was continually falling down between and filling up the chasm, and so turning the island into a peninsula.

After the King had seen all of interest that Sir Robert had to show him, and satiated his eyes with looking on the prospect before him, they returned to the mainland, when Sir Robert, apologizing for the smallness of his stores, rejoiced that a great catch of pilchards

the night before would at least prevent the King from going fasting on his way. Various cakes rapidly compounded, and a good store of Cornish cream, made a homely but palatable meal, so that the King declared that on fasting-days he would fain dine with Sir Robert of Dundagel. The viands were laid in the hall, a stately building, but even then fast verging to decay.*

The King was so delighted with his entertainment and the whole spirit of the place, that he turned to a priest of Exeter, who had taken the Cross, and was now in his company, and said:

'Father Joseph, castles decay and rocks are rent, but immortal verse outlasts them all. It will be long ere we forget this spot; but if you make it immortal by your muse, it will live when the buildings themselves have disappeared.'

* In the time of John of Eltham, Earl of Cornwall and son of Edward II., it was obliged to be removed as being unsafe.

'I can scarce hope, my liege, that my poor verse will outlive these strong walls and firm fortifications; yet your behest shall be fulfilled.'

And when they reached St. German's, on their return journey, Father Joseph presented the King with a small scroll, on which were written some Latin verses, which have, as Richard predicted, outlived the Castle itself. A translation of these may be read in Gilbert's 'History of Cornwall.'

The King now crossed the high land of Cornwall at an angle, and for miles crossed those lonely moors where one seems to breathe with a freedom that is denied to more cultivated districts; but he would see St. Michael's Mount, which looks out upon the sea, beneath which lies hidden the land of Lyonnesse, where Arthur held his court, and where was fought his last battle. Not far from there he was shown the lake where Arthur's sword was caught by 'the arm clothed in white samite,' and

from whence he was borne by fairies to his last resting-place at Avalon.* Richard now had to hasten back to less romantic scenes.

At St. German's he viewed the ancient Cathedral of Cornwall, which even then had ceased to be a bishop's see. From thence they passed into Devon, and there he was met by Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon, with a magnificent following. He invited the King to his Castle at Plympton, and there De Courcy had the happiness of meeting his eldest sister, Alice de Redvers, Countess of Devon. He had been her pet and darling, but had seen little of her since his childish days. Whilst he was in France she had married, and since then had with her husband kept almost regal state, as they governed in the King's name in the West. Strange it

* The Looe Pool and Bar, near Helstone, answer to Tennyson's description of the place where Arthur fell. But it is far more probable that his last battle was fought at Camelford, near the north coast.

seemed to her, and hard to recall her young brother, in the great statesman, the mighty warrior whose fame was well-assured, and his prowess known in all Christian lands.

But we must hasten on with Richard to his coronation. Though Winchester was still the capital of England, yet since the time when the three great events of the consecration of the church, the burial of one king and the coronation of another happened within a few days of each other at Westminster Abbey, that was the place where our sovereigns henceforth assumed their prerogatives, and received the Divine sanction to their titles.

This rite, magnificent as it was, was despoiled of much beauty and grace, from the quaint order that was issued forbidding the presence of 'women and Jews!' Now it is not to be supposed that so gallant a prince as Richard Cœur de Lion classed women with 'dogs and unbelievers'—the mildest epithet bestowed

in those intolerant times upon Jews. The latter were intended merely to be excluded from consecrated ground, and the whole of what is now called 'The Sanctuary' was considered holy, and set apart from common and profane uses. Women were denied admittance because Richard was not yet released from the claims of Alice of France, though it was now well known, he could not possibly wed her, but till he was free from the entanglement that his engagement to her caused, he was unable to avow his attachment to the beautiful Berengaria of Navarre, nor could his mother, in her garments of widowhood, preside upon the occasion. Women, therefore, were excluded, and, whatever they may have thought, seem to have borne their exclusion with fortitude. Not so the Jews, who foolishly made an attempt to force their way into Westminster Hall, apparently not understanding that the order banished them from the precincts, as well as from the Abbey itself.

They wished to propitiate the King by large gifts, but being rudely repelled by guards at the entrance, the multitude, seeing staves raised, began hustling, throwing stones, and beating them. In endeavouring to fly they were pursued; and the mob, getting furious, was not content with ill-treating those who had attempted to gain an entrance, but men's minds being inflamed, by all the talk of the Crusades, against Jews and infidels, the result was a massacre of that unfortunate race. And, sad to say, this was not confined to London, but it spread over England, till, in the city of York, a terrible tragedy took place. A number of the wealthiest of the Jews, driven to despair by the cruelties which were being enacted, shut themselves up in the Castle, and, first killing their wives and daughters with their own hands, set fire to the place, and perished in the flames, rather than trust themselves to the tender mercy of Christians.

Alas for Christianity! and alas for the profane imprecation, 'His blood be upon us, and upon our children'—not yet atoned for by nineteen hundred years of wandering, suffering, and scorn. God grant them eyes to see and ears to hear, that His blood may indeed be upon them to cleanse their sight and purge their souls!

Meanwhile, in spite of the absence of ladies, the coronation was a magnificent spectacle, and Richard made a splendid and imposing central figure in the tableau. The oath which was imposed, and which he took, shows that Richard claimed only to be what is called a constitutional sovereign, and that he was considered to be entitled to the crown only as long as he kept his vow. He himself took the crown from the altar and handed it to Becket's successor, Archbishop Baldwin, who placed it on his head.

After the religious rite was over, that of homage had to be paid, and every knight

and baron who held directly of the King had to perform the ceremony. De Courcy laid aside his robes and coronet, and paid his homage as Lord of Courcy in Normandy, and Baron of Stoke in Somerset; then, assuming them again, he took his oaths as Premier Baron of Ireland for his Earldom of Ulster and Barony of Connaught, and received the confirmation of his commission as Lord Deputy. Walter de Lacy followed, doing homage for his Barony of Meath; while Nicholas de Tristram appeared with the Cross on his shoulder, and, in his father's stead, did homage for the Barony of Howth.

Amongst the Barons of England, Sir William de Briwere took the oaths for the Lordship of Briwere on the Ile,* and Burgh-Walter on the Parret. The King had decided that De Briwere's remaining in England would advantage him rather than his joining the Crusade, and told him that it was to him and such as him that he

entrusted the safety of his kingdom in his absence, adding :

'You served my father well, De Briwere, and I believe that you will be faithful also to me.'

'I will, so help me God, my liege!' he answered.

Then forth came Sir Henry de Louvelle, bearing the Cross on his shoulder. His two old pupils, De Courcy and De Briwere, had tried in vain to dissuade him, for he was an elderly man, old age coming on more rapidly in mediæval times than it does now ; yet when he would not be dissuaded, De Courcy could not but be thankful to place his nephew under the same guardianship that had been so blessed to himself.

After the coronation was the banquet in Westminster Hall, which, as it stood then, was a Norman building of the age of William Rufus. After this, Richard started on a northern tour, visiting the principal shrines in that part of his dominions,

those Barons who had attended him on his western tour now for the most part returning home.

Sir John de Courcy and Sir William de Briwere travelled with their old friend, Sir Henry de Louvelle, or Percheval, for he had now assumed that name; and it seemed to them a strange revival of old times; but their paths in life were diverging now farther and farther from each other; Sir Henry and his young charge bound for the Holy Land, De Courcy soon to return to Ireland.

'And you, De Briwere,' said the latter, 'to live in an atmosphere of scheming and intrigue! How can you frame your words so as to be decently civil to Prince John? Bah!'

Neither Sir Henry nor De Briwere could help laughing; but the latter said:

'You forget, De Courcy, that that is the very reason why I remain, to use my influence, such as it is, with the Prince; and, by way of accomplishing this effectually, you

would have me quarrel with him before the King has left the country.'

'Ah, well! I would rather live in an Irish bog all my life than practise such arts.'

'Yes, John,' said Sir Henry, 'your natures differ so that you cannot understand De Briwere; but nevertheless, if you both are, as you must be, true and loyal, you may do good service to God and your King each in your own way. But did you see Walter de Lacy conversing with the Prince?'

'Yes,' said De Courcy; 'but it seemed to me that the Prince rather sought him out.'

'So in fact he did; but it was scarcely necessary, as a matter of courtesy, to say to the Prince that he considered, in truth, that his homage should have been rather paid to *him*, as Lord of Ireland, than to the King.'

De Courcy's face flushed a deep red.

'Are you sure, Sir Henry, that he used such words?'

'I am quite sure, for I was standing close by. I turned round and suggested that, the grant of the Lordship of Ireland having been revoked, there could be no possible doubt as to whom the homage should be paid.'

'And what a scowl you must have had!'

'I am afraid I had,' said Sir Henry, laughing. 'Happily, I shall be far enough away from him; but I would that the King had not added the Earldom of Somerset to the other titles he has lavished upon his brother.'

'Well,' said De Courcy, 'I had thought better things of late of Walter de Lacy; but while I have power to prevent it, Prince John shall never again set foot in Ireland. But, prythee, let us leave this unsavoury subject, and talk of other things. You will come home with me, Sir Henry, and let me introduce my wife to you.'

The invitation was gladly accepted, and De Briwere said:

'You have but seen half of De Courcy till you have seen his lady.'

'Surely,' laughed Sir Henry, 'Lady de Courcy is not of such goodly proportions as our friend here?'

'She is,' said De Briwere warmly, 'the sweetest, daintiest, most lovely lady that ever mine eyes did see. I did but mean that the half of John ever seems to remain with her; and one never gets the John of old, unless his lady be with him.'

'She is indeed my better half,' said John; 'and appears not only to me, but to all who come near her, a very angel of grace and beauty. You may ask your young squire here, what he thinks of his aunt.'

'She has been friend, sister, and mother to me, since I lost my own!' said the boy, with deep feeling.

Sir Henry asked De Courcy of his next movements.

'I propose,' he said, 'staying in England as long as I can be spared. My brother

Almeric governs in my absence, and he is but as myself; unless, therefore, he sends desiring my return, I intend remaining some time with my mother, and then taking my wife to visit the home of my ancestors in Normandy.'

Sir Henry Percheval was as charmed with Elfrica as John would have desired, and he won her heart and made her, had it been possible, even a more proud and happy wife than before, when he said:

'I thank God that my old friend and pupil in chivalry should have found so worthy a helpmeet as yourself, lady. Honest and upright, faithful and true, brave and tender, he ever was; but he is more than that now; he is a valiant knight, a wise statesman, and a Christian gentleman.'

Elfrica's eyes swam with happy tears, and as she held out her hand to Sir Henry, he lifted it to his lips and said:

'I shall look forward to meeting you

and him in the city of our God, in the heavenly Jerusalem.'

And so he made known his intention of never returning again, but going to his rest in Palestine.

END OF VOL. II.

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